

Panama must avoid maritime oligopolies warns new shipping association

Nation must support terminal access and competition as container lines consolidate port holdings, says MAPA president.

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Image: Michele Labrut

[Panama](#) must avoid a monopoly and oligopoly in ports management and maritime sector that could affect the operation of the industry, leaving out the possibility of new shipping lines and transport players entering the market, said Ricardo Lince, president of the National Maritime Association of Panama (MAPA).

His comments were made at the swearing in ceremony of this new guild that brings together shipping lines, maritime transport and logistics operators and port terminals. MAPA is a complement to the Panama Chamber of Shipping which covers more sectors, said Lince. Most of MAPA's members are also members of the Maritime Chamber.

Lince believes that Panama must have clear rules to attract more shipping lines and investments.

‘The trend of global shipping lines is to acquire port terminals to integrate them into their own logistics chain. If in Panama we have port terminals controlled by these shipping lines, a key question arises: how are these same operators going to attract other competing lines? The country must seriously reflect and establish clear rules that allow the entry of new players, if the demand justifies it,’ said the president of this new shipping association.

Lince's pronouncement comes as US equity fund BlackRock, together with [MSC](#) subsidiary Terminal Investment Limited (TIL), is said to be negotiating the purchase in Panama, of the ports of Balboa and Cristobal which are managed by CK Hutchison.

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According to Lince, Panama's State must contribute to avoid monopolies and oligopolies in the management of the port terminals and in the maritime sector.

'Panama needs stability to attract investment and generate confidence. It is essential to guarantee real competition, with clear and transparent rules, as well as to establish mechanisms to avoid monopolies or oligopolies that could distort the [maritime] market. The state must act as guarantor of this balance, now more than ever,' he said.

Lince believes that Panama needs to define a strategy to strengthen its role as a maritime country with public-private partnerships and the establishment of long-term policies for the sector.