

radically in terms of its economic structure and social organization. These shifts correspond to significant transformations in its image and urban structure. In the Middle Ages the city was a booming trade port. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it lost control of cargo traffic, only to emerge as Europe's main financial center. In the nineteenth century, the port rediscovered its role and because of this the city took an active part in establishing the Kingdom of Italy, becoming the center for nationalized heavy industry – steel, mechanics, and shipbuilding.

The world-wide restructuring of industry, the conversion of maritime transport modes, and the crisis in the system of state shareholdings in the industry represented a global challenge for Genoa. The start of the 1990s produced the first results of this transformation with an increase in port traffic after years of decline. It also brought the realization of initiatives to reutilize industrial areas and the first positive responses to efforts to launch tourism in a city. Genoa has the advantage of being able to rely on its position within a very important environmental area, on its extensive artistic heritage, and on possessing one of Europe's largest historic centers.

The factors behind the economic recovery of the city include the increase in demand for air transport, the significant development of port activities (in particular cruise ships), and a rediscovered penchant for conference and tourism initiatives. The increase in port activity lies significantly in the area of container traffic. The main Mediterranean ports have developed quickly over the last five years with an average growth rate of 19 percent compared to about 8 percent for North Europe. The Italian ports enjoyed growth of about 21 percent. Ports with the best overall performance during the last five years, measured in terms of their average growth rates, were Genoa (+30 percent), Valencia (+21 percent), and Barcelona (+16.5 percent) (Port Authority of Genoa, 1999).

Genoa has thirteen 4-star and twenty-eight 3-star hotels. The city also has a Conference Center and numerous other convention sites. It hosts important trade fairs, including the Boat Show, Euroflora, and cultural events such as the N. Paganini International Violin Award. The port of Genoa processed a total of 1,265,593 TEU of container traffic and 80,060 passengers in 1998 (Autorità Portuale di Genova, 1999).

### **The Las Palmas de Gran Canaria context**

The Port of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is one of the most important in Spain. In comparison to Genoa, the Puerto de Las Palmas handled 484,477 TEU of container traffic and 907,456 passengers in 1998 (Puertos de Las Palmas, 1999). For five centuries, it has been a base for ships sailing on the mid-Atlantic. Its strategic location and the excellent condition of its bay made it one of the most important ports in the main sea routes between Europe, Africa and America. Christopher Columbus used its bay to prepare and repair the caravels *La Pinta* and *La Niña* during his first voyage to America in 1492.

Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is the capital of the province of Las Palmas and is located on the northeast of the island of Gran Canaria. The population of the city is 395,000 distributed over an area of some 40 square miles. Las Palmas is the most densely populated city in the Canary Islands