

The role of inland navigation within the EU's freight transport agenda

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for inviting me to this EBU seminar today. It's a pleasure to be here, especially since the inland shipping sector has always been a sector with which I feel a strong and warm connection. That has to do with my SME background, but also with my conviction that Inland shipping can and should play an important role in Europe's sustainable transport system. I am happy that in Europe there is an increasing awareness of the huge opportunities this sector offers. It has resulted in the Naiades Action Plan, for which I have been the Parliaments rapporteur.

It has also resulted in the appointment of Karla Peijs as coordinator for inland navigation. Considering her bonds and connections with the inland waterway sector, I am convinced that she can contribute to the successful creation of inland waterway projects in Europe. From this spot, I would like to wish her a lot of success as coordinator. I hope the sector and relevant other parties will give her all the necessary cooperation in order to be succesfull.

Today at this seminar the emphasis is on the relation between freight logistics and inland waterways. As we have just heard from Fotis

Karamitsos, the European Commission is strongly in favour of promoting inland waterways with regard to freight logistics. In contrast to for example road transport, inland waterways still offers a considerable capacity for growth. Quite important, because the estimated freight growth till 2020 is considerable: an increase of about 50% is expected. This can only be accomodated if all modalities play their part, individually and in combination. Smart solutions are needed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is clear that inland shipping offers great opportunities, also in terms of the environment. But that doesn't mean we are there quite yet. Relating to freight transport, there are some actions that need to be taken in order to capitalize on these opportunities. Here I would like to mention four of these actions:

1. Improving infrastructure
2. Improving the sustainable performance of inland shipping
3. Ensuring funding for innovation
4. Reducing administrative burdens

1. Improving infrastructure

The most important conditions for reliable inland shipping services are good quality of waterway infrastructure and the availability of multi-functional inland ports. To start with the physical infrastructure itself, removing bottlenecks and necessary maintenance will prove to be one of the main challenges in this area. We have a current maintenance backlog which has to be resolved quickly. Prime responsibility here lies with national and regional authorities, but also on European level action is needed to realise the TEN projects on inland waterways. Also, the

European Parliament called in Naiades for a European Development Plan, which should include an up-to-date inventory of the European inland waterway infrastructure. I hope the European Commission will soon be able to present this Development Plan to us.

A second aspect of infrastructure is the possibilities for intermodality. One of the bigger opportunities for Europe's freight future is and must be increasing intermodality. Considering the economical and ecological capacity of the inland waterways, inland shipping is essential in promoting intermodality. However, at this moment, many inland ports are under great pressure, for example by local and regional governments and development construction companies, who wish to create new residential or commercial areas near riversides. We should therefore have specific attention for the position of inland ports, since they will be crucial when it comes to creating intermodality.

The Marco Polo project was revised to give inland waterway transport and SME's a better chance. That was a specific request of the European Parliament. From the signals I received out of the first calls for proposals it seemed not to be very successful. If that is the case, the European Commission should come up with modifications in order to increase the number of inland waterway transport projects.

2. Improving the sustainable performance of the sector

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Inland shipping has always been regarded as a relatively green transport modality. It still is, but its position is under pressure. Especially as the road sector continues with for example new Euro 6 norms, inland

shipping should also continue to green itself. It's therefore very positive to observe a supporting attitude in the sector itself on this issue. There is great support for cleaner fuels, as there is for bio fuels. However, at this moment both directives are stuck in the process, because we want to add sustainability criteria for bio fuels. I call on the Council to quickly decide on these criteria, so that in inland shipping the developments regarding environmental progress can be continued: Fuel as clean as road transport.

3. Ensuring funding for innovation

A third point of relevance is ensuring sufficient funding for innovation. Considering the challenges that lie ahead, innovation will prove to be crucial in the coming decade. Through innovation, more intelligent systems can be promoted which will be crucial regarding the future of freight transport. The sector itself has of course the primary responsibility for investment and innovation, but support is needed in order to speed up. Therefore the European Parliament has always welcomed the idea to establish a European Waterway Transport Innovation Fund. This Fund can serve as a basis for the financing of new demand-based investments and innovative concepts. Also, the European Parliament has also made clear statements regarding the financing of the Innovation Fund as a tripartite project. The sector itself is willing to contribute but all parties must show their commitments. I am a little bit worried because the final decision on the fund is not taken yet. I hope Commission and Council feel responsible to take their part in this innovation fund.

4. Reducing administrative burdens

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last but not least, effort is needed to reduce administrative burdens in the transport sector. I think it is of the greatest importance that the European Commission takes a serious effort within the context of the new Communication on Freight Transport to screen existing bottlenecks and to seriously consider simplification of procedures when it comes to freight transport. It is of great importance that this happens in close cooperation with the sector. Too often, and despite good intentions, old burdens are replaced by new ones, which do not help to relieve problems for the sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we all know, there are many challenges ahead. But it is important to remember that these challenges are based on the expectation that the inland shipping sector is a vital and crucial sector in the future of sustainable freight transport in Europe. I hope that in close cooperation we can make sure success will occur. Implementing the Naiades Action plan: It's time to start the action, let's get to results!

Thank you all for your attention!

