

**Director General Henrik Hololei participation at EBU Annual Event 12  
April 2018, 15:00**

**Keynote Speech**

**European Barge Union's Annual Event 2018**

Dear Mr Jaegers, Dear President Goris,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a pleasure and honour for me to attend once again the Annual gathering of the European Barge Union.
- Joining you and the inland navigation community at large, every year, is an excellent opportunity for me to share with you the positive developments at EU level in support of this sector.
- And there are reasons to be optimistic as we look ahead. Last year we experienced higher than expected economic growth, both globally and in the EU. The pickup in growth has been broad based, with notable upside surprises in Europe.
- In the EU, real growth in 2017 was corrected 0,6% upwards from the spring forecast to 2,4%. Growth rates for the euro area and the EU beat expectations as the transition from economic recovery to expansion continues. It shows that the EU economy is doing better than during the last decade and, what is more important, the growth projections are also very encouraging.
- This robust performance is set to continue in 2018 and 2019 ( with growth of 2.3% and 2.0% respectively in both the euro area and EU)
- Against that background it is clear that the inland waterways sector is eager to get its share from this growth.

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- I am equally glad to see that innovation is also picking up, as we are witnessing more barge vessels being powered by electric or latest generation engines. The sector is in a good place to compete in the low-carbon mobility market of tomorrow, and I am hopeful progress continues here. I will come back to this later.
- However, the sector also suffers from specific challenges, some that we can influence and others outside that. The usage rate of the existing fleet remains low, and infrastructures are not always in an optimal state. The latter is definitely no news to anyone here but, in the growing economy, it can constitute an even bigger bottleneck.
- Other events such as low water conditions can also have a big impact on operations. But this has more to do with Mother Nature.
- On our side we will, in two months' time, present an overall progress report on the implementation of the NAIADES II Action Plan since 2014, which will give a thorough overview of progress on the policy front and points out areas where we need to push further.
- Let me now recall the most important milestones of 2017, since last year's EBU event.
- First, the Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications in inland navigation was adopted in December. There has been good input from all of you - and I take this opportunity to thank you for your contribution. I believe that we share the same goal of having a modern competence-based system that increases safety and improves the attractiveness of the profession.

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- This legislation should without doubt bring significant benefits in addressing the labour shortage in inland waterways transport by facilitating labour mobility.
- Indeed, crew members will be able to exercise their profession in a cross-border environment in an easier way, as the EU certificates of qualification will be recognised on all inland waterways throughout the EU.
- In order to prepare the standards needed for implementation, the Inland Navigation Standardisation Committee, CESNI, is currently working at full speed.
- Secondly, under the Directive on technical requirements for vessels, we launched the adoption of the so-called ESTRIN-2017 standard. Again, CESNI was fully instrumental in preparing these technical requirements, making this their first big result since its creation in 2015.
- Thirdly, we proposed, as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mobility Package, the revision of the Combined Transport Directive, which promotes the combined use of different modes for freight transport. We trust that the current inter-institutional negotiations will lead to an instrument that will make it easier for companies to claim incentives and therefore stimulate the combined use of trucks and trains, barges or ships for the transport of goods.
- Last but not least, we reinforced the dialogue with the sector by setting up several expert groups gathering stakeholders, Member States, River Commissions, workers' representatives, and the UNECE. These expert groups will strive to streamline and align policy advice in crucial fields such as digitalisation, social aspect and technical requirements for the inland navigation vessels. The European Barge Union is an important member of

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these expert groups and a significant contributor to their work, thank you very much for that.

- Let me now turn to the forward looking vision for the inland navigation sector from the European Commission's perspective.

***The potential of inland waterways as a green and efficient mode of transport***

- The conference on Multimodality in Sofia last month officially launched the Multimodality Year. In this context, the potential of inland waterways to serve modern transportation needs and to be an integral actor of the whole transport and logistics chain is very high.
- Multimodality is important in many ways. It is a contributor to general efficiencies and business opportunities. Crucially, we also believe it will drive sustainable mobility. Essentially, in the future, all transport would be multimodal, digitalised and complementary.
- Multimodality is also the economically rational approach to find real alternatives to the sole use of the ocean ship, car, plane or truck, and ensuring the right place for rail, inland waterways and short sea shipping.
- It will ensure economic strength and efficiency by combining the different modes to ensure the best, fastest, cheapest options of travelling or carrying goods. The different modes, after all, bring different characteristics and strengths for a better integrated transport.
- In this context, inland waterways have a big potential to serve modern transportation needs, by being a key actor across the whole transport and logistics chain.

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- To reach the full potential of the sector, we will however need to work in several areas.

**Infrastructure**

- Let me start with infrastructure. With the TEN-T guidelines and the Connecting Europe Facility, we could make a step change in transport infrastructure policy. In fact, we are doing this already by creating more European value added, addressing the real bottlenecks and missing links.
- We have established a core network where high standards are set and deadlines for implementation have been agreed. But there is a big gap between the vision to 2030 and the state of affairs as of today.
- However, the investment needed to maintain and improve basic infrastructures in locks, canals and bridges are significant. Connectivity of inland ports with railways also remains an issue in many stretches of the main European waterways.
- Information and communication technologies, including those supporting River Information Services, need to be upgraded in many parts of the network. Moreover, water quality and environmental conditions require substantial improvements in several European rivers basins.
- And, as you know too well, tackling all such issues properly will require adequate financing. This is why the European Commission has put so much emphasis in the use of the Connecting Europe Facility and of the Structural Investment Funds for supporting sustainable transport infrastructure projects.

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- Even though inland waterways projects were approved in the "blending call" which closed at the end of last year, we have been confronted with high oversubscriptions for limited budget possibilities.
- The next multi-annual financial framework and the allocation of resources for CEF-2 over the next financial period will be very important in that regard. The Commission plans to propose the next MFF i.e. EU long-term budget on May 2 and CEF regulations in June.
- Rivers are the main assets on which your business relies – this is self-evident but merits restating. And whilst the water may flow freely, we have a primary obligation to ensure the river can maintain perfect infrastructure status.
- As you well know, sadly that is not always the case. Recent disputes across the Bulgarian and Romanian sides on dredging responsibilities are a case in point. But, in the end, no matter how much legislation and talking we may like to do at the Commission, actual work must be implemented to ensure the rivers are kept in optimal conditions.
- This means Member States – none excluded - have to pull their weight; some responsibilities cannot be shifted elsewhere. Of course we are always here to support and push. But I encourage you to also apply pressure where this is needed, so that you may help us to help you.

**Innovation and adaptation to market needs**

- However, having good infrastructure is not enough. The sector needs to stay competitive in many other ways too. This, in turn, will require some adaptation and innovation coming from your side.

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- Let me point out again the importance of sustainability. In Horizon 2020, operators in the inland navigation sector will need to confront the issue of new environmental emission limits as the EU has set ambitious goal for reaching close to zero emission transport.
- It is clear that, to reach that target, an important effort in the renewal of engines and the use of alternative fuels will be required. It is no secret that the European Commission is very keen to see a "greening effort" from the operators.
- That means an extra effort to invest in low-emissions, high energy efficiency alternative fuel engines that go beyond today's minimum mandatory standards.
- A sustainable fleet is essential for the long-term competitiveness of the sector. And here the operators, but also public Authorities - European, national, regional and local - equally have to step up their actions to support the greening efforts.
- The first "Blending call", last year, selected two innovative projects for alternative fuelled inland waterways ships and infrastructure (electric and LNG). The second part of the "blending call" dedicated €350 million CEF grants for alternative fuels. The final day for submission of projects is today and I hope that the inland waterways transport sector has responded adequately to this call.
- The Commission also adopted a Decision authorising the use of €7 million from the Inland Waterways Fund for the purpose of establishing a "European Inland Waterways Transport Platform".

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- The Platform – created last October – is managed by the European Barge Union (EBU) and the European Skippers Organization (ESO) and will promote projects of common interest and in particular the greening and innovation of the fleet. I call the Member States concerned to fully support it. I strongly believe that the Member States concerned, as much as the Commission, are eager to see its first results. The sector really needs it! So let's make a common effort to achieve this.
- The greening of the sector needs to have a common vision on future innovative solutions that could open up new market opportunities, whilst promoting better integration of inland navigation in a multi-modal chain.
- That is why I am calling the sector to set up a common and integrated innovation roadmap, including a clear vision of the potential technologies for a greener fleet in the future.

**Digitalisation**

- The introduction of new business models and operational practices based on technological innovation will be up to market operators. But it is easy to realise that the modal shift and more efficient use of inland waterway transport will only happen if the sector makes full use of the opportunities provided by the digitalisation.
- Unfortunately, today the sector is still “digitally isolated” in the logistics chain and we must break out of this isolation. This is why DG MOVE is launching the debate about the creation of a Digital Inland Navigation Area, (DINA), as a priority of the EU Transport Policy for the coming years. We will propose a mapping of existing and upcoming initiatives and challenges in a Staff Working Document at the beginning of June.



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- The challenge is to ensure that inland navigation is operated very efficiently and becomes fully embedded in advanced "just-in-time" logistics.
- The challenge is also to reduce the administrative burden and streamline checks of cargoes, vessels and crews by means of advanced electronic tools.
- Inland waterways can become the most intelligent, safe and efficient mode of transport with the best digital connections to rail, road, and deep and short-sea systems, and thereby be right at the heart of the future development of the TEN-T corridors.

### Conclusion

- Ladies and gentlemen, the aim of the EU Transport Policy is to help to ensure that inland navigation is fully embedded in the multimodal logistics chains.
- This has to be supported by the actions of the sector itself – as represented here by EBU and all other stakeholders – in making a continued effort to take up innovative solutions.
- Only through these combined efforts will we succeed, together, in further developing the sector, supporting and delivering economic growth and maintaining and hopefully increasing quality jobs.
- This year is a special year that gives us a special opportunity to push this agenda forward. It is the year of multimodality and a year when the river commissions – the Rhine (*CCNR is formally the oldest international organization in modern history. Its origins date back to the Congress of Vienna (1815), although its formal legal foundation did not take place until 1868 with the “Mannheim Document”. The organization is thus celebrating its 150th year*) and the Danube Commissions (*The **Danube Commission** was*

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*established in 1948 by seven countries bordering the river, replacing previous commissions that had also included representatives of non-riparian powers. Members include representatives from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Slovakia, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, and Serbia. Celebrating 70 years).* In addition to that, the second half of the 2018 Austrian Presidency has ambitious plans to drive the sector forward. And, I am sure, so will the Romanian Presidency next year.

- So let's make full use of these opportunities and make it a success for this very important transport mode and help it to regain its rightful place in the transport and logistic chains.
- But before I finish, I would first like to pay tribute to the outgoing EBU President Günther Jaegers. Let me start by congratulating Gunther on his strong track record as President of EBU.
- Since you took the helm of the organization in 2016, “much water has flown under the bridge”, and you have been a catalyst in uniting the business for a common vision at a time when so much is happening.
- Your business experience heading one of the largest barge operators in Europe is also evident, as well as your practical attitude.
- I have very much appreciated how you have been able to present and sell the many faces of the business: from transport to the tourism potential and beyond. I personally think the sector will need to keep thinking about the many ways it can adapt to the changes in commerce and transport, and lateral thinking will be ever more needed going forward.

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- On this note, I warmly greet Paul [Goris] as the new President of EBU. You are filling large shoes but I have every expectation for a very successful Presidency and fruitful cooperation between us. Good luck and all the very best to you!
- Thank you very much for your attention and for the excellent cooperation that I have thoroughly enjoyed.