

Keynote Speech

European Barge Union's Annual Event 2017

Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure to attend once again the Annual meeting of the European Barge Union.

Last year has been a busy year and many things have happened in your sector since we met last time. And in Europe and wider world.

To start, let me recall three important elements from last year in relation to inland navigation.

Firstly, the new Directive on technical standards of inland navigation vessels came into force in October 2016.

The Directive takes good account of the work of the European Committee for Inland Navigation Standards, the "CESNI", which, I believe, gathers the best available experts, including those of EBU. Thank you for your excellent cooperation in this context.

Secondly, we have made good progress in the discussion of the new Directive for professional qualifications in the inland navigation sector.

There has been good input from EBU and I believe that we share the same goals of improving better training and more mobility for workers.

I would particularly want to do one mention - Ms Meissner, Gesine, you did an incredible job as EP Rapporteur!

I hope we will be able, in the trilogue negotiations, to conclude this file soon for the benefit of the attractiveness of the profession, which is essential for the sector. We need common rules and framework for the whole of EU and fragmentation is definitely not an option here.

Thirdly, we have made good progress in the implementation of the TEN-T core network corridors, having connections in relation to inland navigation more and more present in the discussions.

One thing is evident - we need more investments to renew and improve inland waterways infrastructures.

We are still away from reaching all the key performance indicators, but the basis for the monitoring progress and reporting of bottlenecks in inland navigation are now well established.

The launch of specific working groups in the TEN-T Corridors Forums, last year, is also a good proof of the growing attention paid to the inland navigation sector.

So much about the past.

Today you have invited me here to provide rather a forward looking vision and to hear our views on the main challenges ahead for the inland navigation sector.

So, how do we see the future ?

Potential of IWT in TEN-T

My first point is about the potential of inland waterways to serve the needs of the modernizing transport sector.

In our TEN-T maps, we can see that inland waterway of international dimension has a big potential. But is it realized ?

Rivers, canals and lakes span all over Europe, connect ports with the hinterland and can clearly make our

transport system more sustainable. After all, inland waterways are the most sustainable transport mode. And in the more and more environmentally conscious world – this matters a lot.

From the commercial perspective, it is important to underline that strategic industries for the EU economy — like automotive, chemicals, petro-chemicals, agro-industries and energy production — rely heavily on inland waterways.

But at the same time, there is a lot of unused capacity!

Let me recall here that EU's Transport Policy has always supported the role of inland navigation in the European transportation system. That means more cargo on barges and more business and jobs for inland navigation operators.

That also means reinforcing the credentials of inland navigation as an environmentally friendly transport mode with low external costs.

We need to innovate, become even more sustainable, generate employment opportunities, and improve the infrastructure. When I say innovate – I have particularly

in mind digitalization and the new opportunities. But I equally have in mind new business models and partnerships.

In addition to that it is evident that we need to better connect inland waterways with rail, road, maritime transport!

First challenge: infrastructure

Let me start with the infrastructure challenge. With the new TEN-T guidelines and the Connecting Europe Facility, we can make a step change in transport infrastructure policy.

We have now a core network where high standards are set and deadlines for implementation have been agreed.

But there is a big gap between this clear vision for 2030 and the situation now.

There are important investment needs to maintain and improve basic infrastructures in locks, canals and bridges. Small things – big impacts!

Connectivity of inland ports with railways is 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. This should equally be seen as part of the digitalization exercise.

Moreover, water quality and environmental conditions require substantial improvements in several European rivers basins.

A lot needs to be done and the financing needs are significant. This is why the European Commission has put so much emphasis in the use of the Connecting Europe Facility and EFSI for supporting sustainable transport infrastructure projects.

Let me underline that I would be very happy if more inland waterways projects would be approved in the CEF calls and also in the "blending call" that has been just announced! But it is very much in your hands too.

But it is also fair to remind that there is significant oversubscription and limited budget possibilities related to the calls.

The revision of the next multi-annual financial framework and the possible allocation of resources for the

Connecting Europe Facility over the next financial period will be very important in that regard. We need your strong voice and unanimous support here!!! Do not miss the opportunity to speak out. And speak out loud.

Second challenge: innovation and adaptation to market needs

Having good infrastructure is not enough. We also need a healthy **business** environment. We need dynamic operators, creating new business opportunities and fully utilizing the potential of the Single Market.

The opportunities of passenger transport, continuing containerization and the transport of smaller payloads are just three examples of growth opportunities for inland waterway transport.

But there are undoubtedly many others. Seizing these opportunities is also the best response to the concerns about overcapacity. But it will require adaptation and innovation.

Around 2020, operators in the inland navigation sector need to confront the issue of new **environmental** emissions limits.

I refer of course to the "non-road mobile machinery regulation".

An important effort of renewal of **engines** and use of alternative fuels will be needed. And the European Commission would be keen to see a "**greening effort**" from operators.

That means an extra effort of investing in low-emissions, high energy efficiency engines that go beyond today's minimum mandatory standards. No doubt this is one of the key elements for ensuring the long term competitiveness of the sector.

Public Authorities, at different levels - European, national, regional and local - have to step up their efforts to support greening of the inland navigation sector.

For example, setting up a European innovation fund for inland navigation, with the support of National Administrations and financial institutions could be a good option.

But revitalising inland waterways transport is not only a matter for the public authorities. It requires also a genuine commitment of operators to open up new

market opportunities and to promote better integration of inland navigation in multi-modal logistics.

Third challenge: multimodality

Clearly, the introduction of new business models and operational practices based on digitalization is predominantly up to the market operators.

As in all other transport sectors, businesses in the inland navigation sector have to adapt to the new market challenges and opportunities.

Modal shift and better use of inland waterways will only happen if the sector becomes part of advanced logistics systems driven by digitalization.

Today, the sector is digitally isolated in the logistics chain – we need to break out of this isolation. This is essential and also a main driver of change.

Multimodality, based on advanced technologies is crucial for this.

Against this background, DG MOVE is launching the debate about the creation of the Digital Inland Navigation Area, DINA, as a priority of the EU Transport Policy for the coming years.

The challenge is to ensure that inland navigation is operated efficiently and becomes fully embedded in advanced "just-in-time" logistics.

The challenge is also to reduce 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. This is worth striving for!

Human factor

Lastly but definitely not least, a couple of words about people involved in the sector. This is a sector with long traditions, European know-how and it is essential to maintain this high level of professionalism also for the future generations.

We need to find ways to better promote the opportunities in the sector and to better attract young people to get

engaged. As I said earlier – there is a lot of potential and we need to tap into that!

It is important to make the inland navigation sector an attractive career for well trained professionals from the student stage to the senior position levels in the industry.

It is important to find means to support the education in this sector; create career opportunities and enhance & promote labor market communication.

Being part of the wider European system should support and encourage workers to be mobile. This is precisely what the EU is aiming at with the proposed Directive on professional qualifications in the inland navigation sector.

I would also like to say that I am particularly pleased with the work of the social partners in the Sectorial Dialogue Committee, which this year will celebrate an important anniversary.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

There continues to be significant potential for the inland navigation in Europe. We all together- Commission, EBU

and all other stakeholders – have to make a continued effort to make the best of EU policy actions and existing opportunities. This combined effort will further develop the sector and realize the significant potential that exists.

I wish you success and thank you for the excellent cooperation. Mr. President, Günther, thank you very much for that!

Thank you for your attention and enjoy a stimulating and fruitful day here !
