

EBU event
Keynote speech (14h30-15h30)

First I would like to thank the European Barge Union (EBU) for inviting me today to its annual conference, which takes place at a critical time, as we are currently discussing both in the Council and the European Parliament the revision of the TEN-T regulation for which I am the co-rapporteur. It is an honour to be able to speak along such high-level speakers: Mr Bernard, Czech Deputy Minister of Transport; Mr Hololei, Director General of DG MOVE, and Mr Grulois, President of EBU.

As you may know, inland waterway transport is an issue that I have been following very closely: the region I come from, Northern France, has been historically marked by its heavy industry and coal mines and knows the importance of relying on a well-functioning inland waterway network to support its industry and the related freight transport. My region is crossed by an important and diverse network of canals and waterways, with Calais and Dunkerque as entry ports and the biggest inland waterway worksite, the Seine Scheldt project. In this context, I was often confronted with the difficulties and reluctance of Member States to finance the construction and maintenance of national inland waterways and the lack of cross-border cooperation. However, I also experienced the political and financial mobilisation of the EU, in particular with regards to the Connecting Europe Facility, and the EU has proven to be a reliable partner to

promote inland waterway transport, in particular through several policy initiatives, such as the publication in June 2021 of the NAIDES III Action Plan, a strategy designed to shift more cargo over Europe's rivers and canals and to facilitate the transition to zero-emission vessels by 2050.

But I am convinced that inland waterway transport deserves even more political attention as well as an ambitious regulatory and financial support for the following reasons:

- Environmental reasons: compared to other modes of transport, it is energy-efficient, safe, almost congestion-free and silent. Given the exposition to the consequences of global warming, investments in climate change mitigation and adaptation are essential to ensure the resilience of waterways and to fight the impact of droughts, loss of biodiversity and to enable water regulation.
- Economic reasons: strategic industrial, mining and agricultural products are often being transported in containers on inland waterways.
- Cultural reasons: inland waterways are part of our European natural, cultural and historical heritage. They tell the story of our industrial identity; they are home to listed structures and monuments. In this regard, they also have a strong potential for tourism.

Despite all these reasons, inland waterway transport is a mode of transport that is often lagging behind. Numbers are speaking from themselves: canals and rivers carry just 6% of the freight in the EU. This observation was already made years ago and I regret that little has changed since then. With an inland waterway network of 41 000 km across 25 Member States, there is scope to do a lot more, both along our TEN-T networks and in inner cities, where inland waterways can help to green the last mile of city logistics.

Indeed, I am convinced that the development of inland waterway transport will be made possible precisely thanks to the urgency to decarbonise the whole transport sector and the implementation of the Green Deal. In this regard, the sector is full of potential and shall take advantage of this momentum.

Hence, the revision of the TEN-T regulation comes at a critical time for this sector. As co-rapporteur on the file, my primary objective will be to ensure the effective completion of the three layers: in priority the core network by 2030; and the extended core by 2040 and the comprehensive by 2050. With my co-rapporteure Barbara Thaler, we decided to put emphasis on:

- Increasing and improving the connectivity of the most important and strategic European transport networks, removing bottlenecks and technical barriers, while taking into account the specificities of inland waterway,

canals and rivers and the strong heterogeneity of infrastructure between Member States.

- Maintenance: You know its importance more than any other transport mode: examples on the Danube this summer showed how navigation can be hindered when maintenance measures are not being undertaken. That's why, our report is making sure that maintenance is properly included at the earliest stage of a project and through its life time and will be essential to get European funding.
- Resilience of any infrastructure project given the new geopolitical context and climate conditions.
- A stronger European governance to ensure a coherent deployment and timely completion of the TEN-T. To do so, reporting and monitoring instruments have been strengthened, including the role of the European coordinators and their work plans, as well as provisions to prevent significant delays on the starting or completing work on the networks.

In addition, I strongly welcome the creation of a good navigation status for inland waterways.

To conclude, I am convinced that the inland waterway transport sector could benefit a lot from the revision of TEN-T regulation and I hope that it will trigger an acceleration of ambitious infrastructure projects on European waterways and canals.

I am looking forward to hearing your views, concerns and expectations on the text. Thank you very much for your attention.