

Press release

The European Barge Union (EBU) Event
“ROLE OF INLAND WATERWAY TRANSPORT (IWT)
IN THE FRAMEWORK OF EU’S MOBILITY AND SUPPLY POLICY”

17 November 2022, 14:00 – 19:00

The European Barge Union (EBU) welcomed about 100 participants, keynote speakers, and panellists for intensive and enriching discussions on the challenges and further development opportunities of the inland waterway transport (IWT) sector in the EU with a particular focus on modal shift & urgent need for infrastructure investment and fleet innovation towards energy transition.

The EBU gathered on 17 November 2022 exceptional speakers and panellists from European and international institutions and industry experts to express their positions and propel the main open questions for IWT. The keynote speakers Václav Bernard (Deputy Minister of Transport, Czech Ministry of Transport), Henrik Hololei (Director General European Commission DG MOVE), Dominique Riquet (MEP TRAN committee and co-rapporteur “TEN-T revision”), and Philippe Grulois (President EBU) underlined the importance of IWT¹ in achieving the objectives set up by the Green Deal and its Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.

Mr. Bernard in his keynote speech pointed out the growing importance of inland waterways transport throughout the years - not only because of its economy of scale but also because of its significant role in decarbonising transport, and recently also in transporting grain and raw materials from Ukraine as part of the Solidarity Lanes. To support the sector, he announced the preparation of Council on the NAIADES III Action Plan Conclusions for formal adoption by ministers of transport at the Transport Council on December 5.

Furthermore, he referred to the revision of the Energy Taxation Directive, which is part of the Fit for 55 package. This framework, together with other proposals in the package, will contribute to achieving the key EU objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The draft which is intensively discussed under the Czech Presidency envisages that IWT fuels will not be taxed in the first five years after its entry into force, and subsequently, they will be taxed at a low rate. He expects a policy debate on outstanding issues at the end of the Presidency.

Also, Mr. Hololei emphasised the IWT’s role at the heart of the Solidarity Lanes. The Danube route accounts for more than 50% of Ukrainian grain exports through the Solidarity Lanes, and a significant share of Ukrainian imports, in particular energy. They will be turned into permanent

¹ With over 40,000 km of navigable waterways and 250 inland ports, IWT currently carries some 550 million tonnes of goods per year and is of increasing importance in the field of cruising and passenger transport.

transport and trade corridors between Ukraine and the EU and they are transport's way of helping Ukraine move closer to the EU's single market. Eventually, they will become the backbone of a new grid of links between Ukraine and the rest of our European family, which is largely thanks to the tremendous response of the IWT sector. As one of the cleanest transport modes, inland waterway transport is at the heart of the Commission's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. In fact, it has set an ambitious milestone for the sector: inland waterway transport and short-sea shipping should increase by 25% by 2030 and by 50% until 2050. To realise this goal the Commission has realised a number of legislative proposals, which are underway to be adopted by Council and Parliament.

Mr. Riquet in his key note called for higher political attention for the IWT sector. As co-rapporteur on the TEN-T file in EP's TRAN committee, he is committed to support the sector by setting the right framework conditions. In their report the co-rapporteurs point to some critical shortcomings which require specific attention in terms of an increased ambition for standards and requirements, maintenance, and governance.

EBU's President Philippe Grulois welcomed the addresses and expressions of support by the representatives of the European institutions. He emphasised that IWT has an extensive potential to contribute to the EU policies by absorbing higher volumes on the European waterways. However, *"a number of preconditions need to be met from our perspective to fully materialise the potential of the sector to the benefit of society and economy."* underlines Dr, EBU President.

IWT needs a reliable, safe, cost-effective, and climate-resilient infrastructure network. To achieve this goal, several steps should be undertaken. There is a clear need for more ambitious targets for the infrastructure standards and requirements for enabling further modal shift including urgent investment in waterway infrastructure by the Member States and supplementary funding by the Common European Framework.

The President welcomed the announcement of Council Conclusions on NAIADES III by the Czech Presidency, emphasising the importance to encourage Member States to elaborate and implement long-term strategies.

In view of the revision of the TEN-T regulation the EBU considers the proposed minimum parameters as very unambitious and as such as an absolute minimum. The EBU advocates to lift these minimum standards within the corridor approach to more ambitious parameters enabling the sector to materialise the modal shift goal. Given the level of ambition the President applauded the TEN-T rapporteurs in the Parliament, who acknowledged the need for an increased ambition for standards and requirements and to include maintenance in the scope of the revised regulation, a particular interest of the EBU.

To support the further facilitation of the IWT integration in the multimodal transport schemes the EBU called on the Commission

- to expire the Consortia Block Exemption Regulation (CBER). From the perspective of the Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) sector this exemption led a.o. to a disturbance of

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container handling in the hinterland connection imposing high additional costs on the sector and leading to a reverse modal shift and

- to revise the Combined Transport Directive (CTD) and create a level the playing field in terms of support measures and benefits, which currently are granted to the road/rail leg mainly.

To support the sector in increasing its modal share and setting it on an irreversible path to zero-emissions the President pointed to the already very low externalities of IWT. To speed up the deployment to reach the emission reduction goals in the IWT sector needs the right technical solutions, sufficient alternative fuels and specific aid schemes and fiscal incentives. In concrete terms this means the IWT sector calls for

- available and affordable technology to broadly deploy innovation in the sector
- flexible goal based regulatory framework avoiding long term permission processes for innovative solutions
- tailor made and dedicated funding combining national and EU vessel funding schemes.

IWT is an enabler to absorb much higher volumes and to deliver the ambitions of the EU Green Deal. Keeping already a very positive environmental record today the intended increase of the modal share of IWT will substantially contribute to an overall decrease of GHG emissions of transport. The sector is prepared and committed to take the necessary steps towards zero emission and to take over much higher volumes of freight and passengers on the waterways if the right framework conditions are met.

Brussels, 18 November 2022

Photos from the event: [Mr. Bernard](#)
[Mr. Hololei](#)
[Mr. Riquet](#)
[Mr. Grulois](#)

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About EBU

The European Barge Union (EBU) represents the inland navigation industry in Europe. Its members are the national associations of barge owners and barge operators of 9 European inland navigation countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Romania and Switzerland). Besides it represents the interests of a number of international organisations dealing with IWT and Short Sea Shipping. www.ebu-uenf.org

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