

Dear Caroline [Nagtegaal],

Dear Paul [Gooris],

Dear Panelists,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a great pleasure to be here with you today and discuss the challenges and opportunities facing inland waterway transport. I am delighted that EBU could host this event with physical presences after almost a year and a half of digital meetings.
- I still remember my last event on inland waterway transport in the port of Brussels in 2019 where I was pleased to see so many innovative vessels.
- Who would have then thought that our life will soon be significantly restricted for 1,5 years and even beyond and that the pandemic would have such a severe impact on EU citizens, its economy and particularly transport & mobility sector and the core freedoms of the EU.
- Transport has been one of the sectors hit hardest, with damage stemming from the huge negative demand shocks following the necessary containment and mitigation measures.
- This has led to supply chain disruptions, steep reductions in foreign and domestic travel and tourism, and reduced connectivity across the EU as a whole.
- It has also resulted in immense operational and financial difficulties for many businesses active in the transport sector, many of them small and medium-sized enterprises, promoting entrepreneurial spirit.
- The pandemic has shown that, in times of crises, concerted, proportional and timely responses at the EU level are necessary. That is why the EU and its Member States must do their utmost to continue to preserve the integrity of the Single Market and enhance the functioning of the Single European Transport Area. Unilateral and uncoordinated measures make it impossible for our transport and logistic systems to function correctly. Through the value

chains, this presents very detrimental knock-on effects to our wider economy, including the competitiveness of our industrial sector and many jobs across the EU.

- Transport will remain strategically important for the European economy during the recovery phase. We need to continue to work on the future of Europe's transport system so that it can quickly recover from the impact of this crisis and leap forward to a more sustainable, smarter and resilient future. We need to set out much needed reforms, policies and actions to support the sector.
- First of all, I would like to emphasize the importance of our Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, being a major deliverable by the Commission, setting out a roadmap for putting European transport firmly on the right track for the future. Completing the Single European Transport Area remains the cornerstone of European mobility and transport policy.
- The strategy is structured around three key objectives: making the European transport system sustainable, smart and resilient.
- It underlines the need to boost the use of more sustainable transport options, including inland navigation. In that regard, one of our ambitious milestones is that inland waterway transport and short-sea shipping should increase by 25% by 2030 and by 50% until 2050.
- Today I am pleased to announce that the Naiades III action plan will be adopted by the Commission in the coming days [*expected on 24/06*]. This action plan will be the cornerstone for achieving the objectives of the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy for inland waterway transport.
- The increasing the use of inland waterway transport will not only be ensured through the further development on inland waterways along the TEN-T network but also by investing in multimodal terminals, together with an optimal data exchange between transport modes.
- Even though inland navigation is one of the most CO₂ efficient modes per transported tonnes of goods, one of the big challenges for the sector is to move further towards the zero emissions vessels.
- There is no single solution for achieving zero-emission shipping and many different technological solutions, for example, efficiency improvements, fully

electric and hybrid propulsion, wind assistance, smart shipping technologies, zero-carbon fuels, integration of fuel cell technology and other, must be brought together and integrated within a single vessel and for different applications.

- We are well aware of the specificities of your sector and that we need a tailor-made approach. We will have to take account the limited market size of the inland waterways transport, the high risk incurred by the operators, which are often SMEs, and the extra cost of the green technologies the market is not prepared to cover.
- Financial opportunities should be facilitated by public authorities at regional and national levels, by the river commissions, as well as at EU level through funding instruments such as InvestEU and its ‘Sustainable Infrastructure Window’, in particular for smaller operators.
- Furthermore, synergies between small operators could be pursued, for instance through joint purchasing, joint innovation actions or further consolidation. The galvanising role of the Inland Waterway Transport Platform¹ will be crucial in this regard.
- Let me also emphasise the absolute importance to fully embrace the opportunities that smart mobility and digitalisation can bring. Innovation, including automation, takes place at different levels, be it the level of the vessel, the infrastructure, the way the sector runs its business and connects with other modes, and, of course, at the level of smarter jobs.
- Digitalisation improves the flow and exchange of data, helps to reduce administrative burden to allow for the optimisation of traffic flows and for a much better integration of all types of transport.
- This will mean that users can easily mix and match transport modes according to their needs. This is the gateway to the genuine multi-modal network that integrates inland waterways as part of an advanced logistics systems, which are driven by digitalisation.
- Inland waterways can be a fully sustainable, safe, intelligent and efficient mode of transport. With the best digital connections to rail, road, and deep and short-sea systems it can be an integral part in the development of our

¹ The IWT Platform was created by the European Barge Union (EBU) and European Skipper’s Organisation (ESO) with reserve funds (COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 718/1999 of 29 March 1999 on a Community-fleet capacity policy to promote inland waterway transport). One of the aims of the IWT Platform is to promote the greening of the sector. The platform is monitored by Austria, Belgium, Germany, France and the Netherlands.

trans-European transport network. In this way, inland waterways transport will be right at the heart of our European Green Deal and fit for the Digital Age.

- Only by means of this combined effort – on greening and digitalisation - will we succeed in further developing the sector, driving growth and ensuring quality jobs.
- With the NAIADES III Action Programme coming this week and the European Parliament's report on inland waterway transport to be voted at the TRAN committee on 28 June, the sector will have a lot of high-level attention and interest. This will help us to support the sector in the years to come. But we must work together to fully utilise these opportunities and take inland waterway transport into a successful future.
- I wish you all the best and success; it has been great to be with you and thank you very much for your kind attention.
