

Speaking Points

Dear Mr Bernard, Dear Dominique [Riquet], Dear Philippe [Grulois],

Dear fellow panellists, 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 would like to thank **the European Barge Union** and its members for putting together such an interesting and very timely event. I am very grateful for the very good and close cooperation we have built up in the past years – one that I am confident has also contributed to driving our ambitious agenda for inland waterway transport forward.

[Setting the scene: IWT in a world of crises]

- The past years have been unprecedented: we have jumped from one crisis to another, and there is unfortunately no sign of relief yet. We have lived through more than **two years of COVID-19, Russia's brutal and murderous aggression against Ukraine** has brought war back to our continent, and Europeans are worrying more and more about how they will be able to pay for their energy bills during winter, while the rest of the world is worrying about getting enough food to survive.
- In fact, the next weeks and months are perhaps the most unpredictable times of our lifetime – Covid pandemic is still with us; the Russian aggression continues and as the aggressor is being kicked out of Ukraine it become more savage and attacks civilian objects and infrastructure as we see again and again; energy and electricity prices run very high as are food prices – all this results of unprecedented level of inflation that is eroding people's disposable income and last but not least interest rates are up, again something that many were forgetting that can happen due to the situation over the more than a decade.
- All this can be concluded by saying that we are experiencing and will continue to experience challenging times that affect our lives and the environment we live in. But we will endure and overcome them.
- **In this context I am proud to say that the transport and mobility sector has lived up to these challenging times.**

- Indeed, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, transport companies and workers helped essential workers and goods move to where they were most needed.
- At the same time, transport stakeholders **quickly reacted to Russia's blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports** and, with the support of the Commission, frontline Member States, Ukrainian and Moldovan authorities, established new, alternative routes via road, rail and inland waterways between Ukraine, the EU and the rest of the world basically overnight.
- **The Solidarity Lanes have become a precious and indispensable lifeline for Ukraine and also a safeguard against a global food crisis.** Since May, they have carried **more than 17 million tonnes of Ukrainian grain, oilseeds and related products.**
- I welcome the **agreement on the continuation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative** – since August, it has provided further support to the export of Ukrainian grain from its Black Sea ports and helped drive down global food prices.
- Both initiatives are complementary – while the Black Sea Grain Initiative focuses on grain only, the Solidarity Lanes remain the only alternative for Ukraine to export all its other goods.
- As such, the Solidarity Lanes have generated **over 19 billion euro for Ukraine.** But they have also allowed **war-torn Ukraine to import what it needs:** food, fuel and much-needed humanitarian aid.
- **Inland waterway companies are truly at the heart of the Solidarity Lanes.** Indeed, **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. In the past weeks, we have even seen **a new surge of transport via the Danube,** showing once again how important the Solidarity Lanes are.
- It has not always been easy, and we still have more to do. But we have rethought logistics chains, created additional capacity, adapted our infrastructure and shifted resources to where they were needed most. The Solidarity Lanes are now here to stay for good.

- They will be turned into permanent transport and trade corridors between Ukraine and 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. **And I am proud to say that this is largely thanks to the tremendous response of your sector.**
- So, what lessons do we take from these past months? **Well, the pandemic and the Russian aggression have 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 difficult for our transport and logistic systems to function correctly.
- **At the same time, neither COVID-19, Russia's aggression nor the current energy crisis have reduced the need to focus on sustainability and climate change.** In fact, this has now become more urgent than ever, especially for the inland waterway sector to survive. This summer's temperature records and droughts across Europe, with barges stuck along the Danube or the Rhine, have been a painful reminder of the need to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

[Naiades III Action Plan & implementation]

- As one of the cleanest transport modes, **inland waterway transport is at the heart of our Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.** In fact, we have set an ambitious milestone for your sector: **inland waterway transport and short-sea shipping should increase by 25% by 2030 and by 50% until 2050.**
- To deliver on this ambitious milestone, the Commission put forward the so-called "**Naiades III Action Plan**" in June 2021 – our European strategy for inland waterway transport.
- The Action Plan has **2 core objectives**:
 - to get more freight onto European waterways,
 - and to facilitate the transition to zero-emission vessels by 2050,

- After more than one year, **implementation is going at full speed**. Let me mention a couple of examples, focused on infrastructure for inland waterway transport.

[Infrastructure & IWT]

- **Inter-institutional negotiations on the revision of the TEN-T regulation are well underway**. Good infrastructure is indeed paramount for inland navigation to be successful – and this summer’s events have been a painful reminder of the need to properly invest into it.
- We already have the “**Good Navigation Status**” in the TEN-T but we have realised we need to define it to make it workable. This is why our proposal foresees that the Commission may adopt guidelines ensuring a coherent approach on the application of the good navigation status in the EU. The discussions with the Council are constructive and we hope that by the end of the year, the Council would have a general approach.
- **Inter-institutional negotiations are also progressing well for the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR)** – trilogues started at the end of October.
- The measures in relation to inland navigation have not changed much: Member States are invited to plan **the supply of zero emission technology infrastructure** while one **on-shore power supply (OPS) will be mandatory in each inland port**. The aim is to ensure that relevant infrastructure is available by 2030 for zero-emission vessels.

[Digitalisation & IWT]

- Of course, we need to bear in mind that infrastructure projects are very costly and take a lot of time to deliver. **Digitalisation can help make a better use of the infrastructure we already have**, so we should all make full use of the opportunities it brings.
- For instance, next year, **we will propose a revision of the River Information Services (RIS) Directive**, to bring it in line with technological developments and better respond to the needs of the sector.
- We are also starting the preparation for an initiative to **harmonise crewing requirements** – as foreseen in the NAIADES III Action Plan –, together digital tools that can be used to control the implementation of these crewing requirements.

[*Funding & IWT*]

- **And last but not least: let's also speak about money.** Indeed, to support inland waterway transport facing the many challenges I mentioned earlier, there are several instruments:
 - **CEF will continue to support infrastructure development.** A new call was launched in September, with a deadline on 18 January 2023.
 - **A topic on Hydrogen inland shipping has been selected in the Rhine area in the Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Joint Undertaking.** Six Hydrogen ships will be demonstrated.
 - **The new Horizon Europe call will be launched by the end of November.** A topic on innovative, zero-emission vessel is included to meet the challenges of low water levels. A topic on Platina 4 is also included.
 - **The next cut-off date for the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Facility was last week.** There were no proposals related to inland waterway transport, unfortunately. I encourage you to apply for the next cut-off date which is 13 April 2023.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Once again, let me express my gratitude to all of you, representing the inland waterway sector for your contribution to addressing the many challenges we are facing.
- The NAIADES III Action Plan continues to be our roadmap to making the sector more efficient and attractive – and I am pleased to see that the implementation is progressing steadily. I also look forward to the adoption of the Council Conclusions on NAIADES in December, as this will give the necessary recognition to the efforts everyone here in the room is doing.
- Finally, let me to close by thanking once again the European Barge Union for organising this event. It is always good to take stock of the implementation of Naiades III with the relevant stakeholders. And I am always very pleased and happy to be present and have the opportunity to address you.
- Thank you for your kind attention
