

Ladies and gentlemen,
good afternoon,

It is a great pleasure to be able to attend this event as a representative of the country holding the Presidency in the Council of the EU.

I would like to thank the EBU for their invitation. The importance of inland waterways transport (IWT) has been growing throughout the years - not only because of its volume capacity but also because of its significant role in decarbonising transport, and recently also in transporting raw materials from Ukraine as part of the Solidarity Lanes.

When used adequately, inland waterways transport can offer a competitive alternative to road and rail. We therefore welcome all the effort by the European Commission to utilise its potential and to include this transport mode in the Green Deal for Europe as well as in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.

I would like to focus on 3 proposals which are currently being discussed and whose objectives will contribute to the efficient and sustainable functioning of IWT.

First of all, Council Conclusions on the NAIADES III Action Plan. After the publication of the Action Plan, the Czech Presidency decided to follow established tradition and to draft Council Conclusions for formal adoption by ministers of transport at the Transport Council on December 5. Through discussions in the Council, we have reached a final text of the Conclusions with an emphasis on continued development of IWT with a view to sustainable and zero-emission transport. Inland waterways transport is very specific by nature, which is why it is important to take into account the diversity among Member States. In general, the Conclusions address reliable infrastructure, modernising ships toward improved effectiveness and lower emissions, ensuring safe working conditions, and digitalisation. We also call for the use of existing tools, sufficient funding, and improved cooperation not only among Member States but also with international partners.

Second, the TEN-T Regulation revision. The TEN-T policy provides an important instrument for the development of a reliable, problem-free and high-quality transport network which will ensure sustainable connections throughout the EU. Currently, there are extensive negotiations underway in the Council, aimed at reaching a compromise text. As for inland waterways transport, we have managed to reflect many Member States' requests. The main objective in this area continues to be maintaining efficient, reliable and safe navigation whilst adhering to minimum requirements on waterways. Our aim is to achieve a general approach at the Transport Council on December 5.

Finally, I would like to mention the revision of the Energy Taxation Directive, which is part of the Fit for 55 package and also partly deals with inland waterways transport. 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 is now regularly discussed in the Council of the EU and it is envisaged that, on the basis of individual MS decisions, IWT fuels will not be taxed in the first five years after entry into force, and subsequently they will be taxed at a low rate. We expect a policy debate on outstanding issues at the end of our Presidency.

I trust that the proposals under negotiation will contribute not only to a sustainable IWT, but also to the sustainability and effectiveness of transport overall, and that they will bring added value.

Thank you for your attention.