Inland waterway transport: integrated European action programme Naiades

2006/2085(INI) - 05/12/2007 - Follow-up document

The European Commission has presented its first activity report on the implementation of the NAIADES programme. The NAIADES programme, covering 2006 to 2013, was set up to promote the use of inland waterway transport and focuses on five strategic areas:

- Improving market conditions.
- Modernising the fleet.
- Developing human capital.
- Strengthening the image of inland waterways.
- Amending the infrastructure.

Both Council and Parliament have endorsed this programme, as has industry. This Communication is the first progress report analysing both the programmes' implementation and achievements thus far. It gives an outline of the financial support offered within the context of the action programme and reports on organisational developments.

Implementation of the programme:

Since the adoption of NAIADES, four legislative acts have been approved concerning:

- technical requirements for inland waterway vessels (this creates harmonised modern requirements for inland waterway vessels covering the entire EU waterway network);
- raising the financial rate for priority projects and for RIS projects from 10 -20% and for cross-border sections up to 30%;
- the "Marco Polo II" programmes, which will continue to promote shifting modes of transport from road to other forms; and
- statistical returns in respect of carriage of goods by inland waterways.

As well as the adoption of these legislative acts, the Commission has sought to improve market conditions by, *inter alia*, producing a "Funding Handbook" the purpose of which is to list an inventory of European national and regional aid schemes. This should be of particular use to SMEs which characterise the market for inland waterways. In terms of modernising the fleet the Commission has presented proposals relating to the transport of dangerous goods (including by inland waterways) as well as proposing a reduction in the maximum permissible sulphur content of gas oils. The Commission has asked the "Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine" (CCNR) to create a market observation instrument. Further, the Commission is hoping to establish a network of promotion centres for inland waterway transport as a way in which to improve the image of inland waterways. As far as the provision of adequate infrastructure is concerned, Mrs Karla Peijs has been appointed European coordinator with a brief to facilitate the realisation of the inland waterway priority axis Rhine/Meuse-Main-Danube and the Seine-Scheldt link. In 2007 three Regulations were adopted in relation to the River Information Services (RIS). These refer to technical guidelines for the planning, implementation and operational use of RIS; on technical specifications relating to vessel tracing systems (Inland AIS) and notices to skippers.

As for the Member States, all are actively engaged in inland waterway transport policy. Indeed one Member State has adapted a comprehensive national action programme entailing some forty measures. Other Member States are encouraging the modernisation of their fleets by offering tax-free reinvestment

schemes and financial aid. Aid is given to those wishing to improve both the economic and environmental performance of their fleet such as grants for cleaner engines, more efficient propulsion techniques, new hull constructions etc. From an industrial point of view, a constructive dialogue with the social partners has emerged within the context of the NAIADES programme. Headway has been made on two major issues: sector-specific working arrangements and professional qualification requirements.

Financial support programmes:

A continuous stream of investment into logistics, fleet modernisation, human resources and the marketing of inland waters is needed. Whilst primary responsibility for this rests with industry, the NAIADES action programme acts as an incentive to further encourage investment in this sector. Within this context, the Council has asked the Commission to submit a proposal for a "European Inland Waterway Transport Innovation Fund". The European Parliament, in a Resolution on NAIADES, supported this initiative and specified that any such fund should be a key instrument of the NAIADES Action Programme. The Commission has undertaken exploratory work on the development of such a fund, in close cooperation with experts.

Any future programme of an "Innovation Fund" would target IWT carriers and operators. Industry will be encouraged:

- to establish new market and transport services in the inland waterway transport sector;
- to modernise the fleet with a view to improved safety, efficiency and higher environmental standards;
- to train and to educate those working in the inland waterway sector; and
- to improve the image of the sector with targeted public relations campaigns.

The programme would run from 2009 to 2013. Financial support for inland waterway services would also be available, in parallel, with the Marco Polo programme for improvements under TEN-T; the Cohesion policy and the RT&D framework programme. Funding for this new instrument could derive from the existing "Inland Waterway Reserve Fund" created under Regulation (EC) 718/1999 though to use it would require the creation of a new legal instrument. The report estimates that the reserve fund amounts to approximately EUR 40 million in today's figures.

Modernising the organisational structure:

The Commission has undertaken an impact assessment regarding the future modernisation of the inland waterways structure in which four options were considered. This study concluded that, even though the current framework may have its shortcomings, no clear advantage would be gained should a new legislative system be adopted. Thus, the report concludes, it is preferable to continue operations under the existing institutional framework and to improve, modernise and coordinate working methods wherever possible. The Commission does not propose the creation of additional structures to the existing institutional framework. For strategic policy developments the European Commission will continue to play a coordinating role.

Conclusions:

The report concludes by noting that in spite of the fact that NAIADES has only been operational for a year and a half the inland waterway infrastructure has already been strengthened. The Commission remains committed to the completion of the programme and fully intends to maintain momentum. Thus, within the coming years the following will be prioritised:

- **Funding:** completion of the "Funding Handbook" and the possible compilation of "State aid guidelines".
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- **The human factor:** a cluster of actions will focus on the human factor including specific working time arrangements; defining professional qualification requirements at an EU level; the harmonisation of minimum manning requirements; and the development of a uniform boat master's certificate.
- **Improvements to the infrastructure:** in addition to the implementation of the RIS, an indicative development plan to improve and maintain inland waterways and ports will be elaborated. This exercise will take account of environmental issues and it will build upon the ongoing dialogue between the international navigation and protection commission for the Rhine and the Danube.
- **Organisational support:** to help support implementation of NAIADES, the Commission will look for support from all interested parties; from the Member States; from the river commissions and from industry. This could take the form of an "IWT think tank". Calls for proposals under the RTD 7 th framework programme could also help facilitate this initiative by, for example, supporting actions designed specifically to target inland waterway transport.