

Inland waterway transport: integrated European action programme Naiades

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PURPOSE: to present a Communication on the promotion of inland waterway transport “NAIADES”.

CONTENT: this Communication sets out an integrated action programme for the promotion of an EU inland waterway transport network and is being presented within the context of the Commission’s “White Paper on European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to decide”, in which the importance of inland waterway transport was emphasised.

Europe’s freight transport system has much room for improvement. Congestion, capacity problems and delays affect mobility and economic competitiveness. Yet, together with rail and short sea shipping, inland waterway transport can contribute to the sustainability of the transport system as recommended by the White Paper, in both an economic and environmentally friendly manner. The growth potential of inland waterway transport remains positive.

In the last two decades inland shipping has successfully entered new markets, such as the hinterland transport of maritime containers which have experienced a two digit annual growth rate. In some regions inland shipping has already conquered a modal share of more than 40% - i.e. in catchments areas of major seaports. Between 1997 and 2004 traffic growth rates in tonne-km, in Belgium of more than 50% and in France of more than 35% have been achieved. The sector is made up of some 12 500 vessels the equivalent loading capacity of 440 000 trucks. Inland navigation has the best performance in terms of external costs, in particular pollution and safety and has a huge capacity to deploy. In other areas, an increase in inland navigation can lead to significant transport cost reductions. Moreover, inland waterway transport is safer than other modes of transport. For example, the number of yearly fatalities in the Netherlands (the country with the highest density of inland waterway transport) caused by was next to zero. If inland navigation cargoes were carried by road, emissions to air in Europe would be at least 10% higher.

In spite of these huge environmental, social and economic advantages, inland waterway transport in the EU remains under-utilised. The challenges facing the EU’s inland waterway transport system include a fragmented market structure combined with strong competition. This has resulted in limited re-investment. Working conditions on board and career possibility are considered less attractive than in other fields of transport. Public authorities and even the transport and logistics industry are often unaware of the advantages of inland waterway transport. Information and Communication technologies such as the River Information Services still require further development. Lastly, the institutional framework for inland navigation in Europe is fragmented. This leads to an ineffective use of administrative resources and a lack of political attention.

To address these challenges the Commission is proposing the creation of an action programme called **NAIADES** – Navigation and inland waterway action and development in Europe. This action plan focuses on five strategic inter-dependant areas for a comprehensive Inland Waterway Transport policy (IWT).

The five areas covered are :

- § **Market:** the Commission's aim is to expand reliable door-to-door inland navigation services whilst at the same time trying to integrate inland navigation within the transport logistics chain. Similarly, it will try to stimulate the development of a general administrative and regulatory framework supportive of a prosperous inland waterway sector;
- § **Fleet:** the action programme will seek to improve vessel design as well as the introduction of technologies to further reduce fuel consumption and harmful emissions from new and existing vessels – e.g. hydrodynamics, improved propulsion, fuel-efficiency and filtering. It will also propose research into commercially viable non-carbon fuels such as hydrogen fuel cells and zero-emission engines. The use of bio fuels such as bio diesel will also be exploited;
- § **Jobs:** the action plan will seek to improve upon working and social conditions through a constructive social dialogue at a European level as well as investing in human capital;
- § **Image:** the Commission notes that the image of inland navigation sector has not kept pace with the logistics and technological performance. General awareness and knowledge of the real potential of the sector in terms of quality and reliability need to be improved. As such the action plan hopes to promote inland navigation as a successful partner in business, to set up and expand European IWT promotion and to monitor trends and developments within the IWT market;
- § **Infrastructure:** the action plan, therefore, foresees the creation of a European Development Plan for the improvement and maintenance of waterway infrastructures and trans-shipment facilities on a trans-European basis. Such a plan should be orientated along the TEN-T network but should also include smaller networks. A European Coordinator could facilitate its implementation. In other initiatives the Commission is seeking support for the implementation of the River Information Services.

To conclude, the report remarks that in order to enable inland waterway transport to be fully exploited and its full potential to be realised a number of framework conditions first need to be met. The proposed NAIADES will help to set up the right framework conditions. It sets up an integrated action programme focusing on five strategic areas fundamental to the further development of the inland waterway transport sector. These key areas are rounded off by a modernisation process that should help boost IWT. Based on Council and Parliamentary discussions, the Commission will present, where appropriate, legislative proposals and implement the policy measures. Each of these proposals will be preceded by a thorough impact assessment. The time frame for the implementation of the plan is the period 2006-2013. The Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council to endorse this Communication and to support the action plan.