

Inland waterway transport: integrated European action programme Naiades

2006/2085(INI) - 12/09/2006

The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Corien WORTMANN-KOOL (EPP-ED, NL) in response to the Commission communication on an integrated European Action Programme for inland waterway transport (NAIADES). MEPs welcomed the Commission initiative and called on the Member States to further develop national policies to stimulate inland waterway transport (IWT) and to encourage regional, local and port authorities and industries to do likewise.

The report stressed that existing markets should be consolidated, in particular by making infrastructure more reliable and better integrated across the whole supply chain. As the sector consists mainly of small businesses, the Commission and the Member States were urged to improve access to finance - especially risk capital - for start-ups. And the Commission was asked to publish as soon as possible state aid guidelines for IWT support schemes and to adopt 'de minimis' rules that take due account of the needs of the sector.

The committee pointed out that "the reliability of the waterway network and the availability of multi-functional (inland) ports is the most important condition for the further development of IWT", and said that Member States must step up their efforts to ensure adequate and reliable infrastructure. The waterway system needed to be integrated with maritime navigation by developing access to the sea, improving interfaces between inland waterway and maritime systems, and investing in new combined inland waterway and seagoing vessels. The report called on the Commission to draw up a European Development Plan for the sector, which should include an up-to-date inventory of the European inland waterway infrastructure. The Commission was also asked to designate as soon as possible - and no later than the end of 2006 - a European Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) coordinator for IWT to support the implementation of priority projects, drawing on experience with existing coordinators.

The committee pointed out that, in 2007, stricter Community limits would have to be laid down for SO_x, PM, NO_x and CO₂ emissions, in particular by promoting low-sulphur fuel. It therefore called on the Commission and Member States to provide incentives to accelerate the introduction and use of fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly engines in IWT, and asked the Commission to submit a proposal setting stricter standards for inland shipping fuels. The committee also stressed the need to encourage the development of clean and efficient vessels under the 7th Framework Programme on Research and Development. Among other recommendations, MEPs wanted the Commission to submit in 2007 a proposal for a European Waterway Transport Innovation Fund for financing new demand-based investments and innovative concepts of European interest in the area of logistics, technology and the environment requiring cross-border cooperation and interoperability.

Lastly, the report stressed the need to continue efforts to harmonise manning requirements and boat masters' certificates, to promote the mutual recognition of qualifications and to develop common training standards for the sector.