



July 5th 2021

EU IWT PLATFORM WELCOMES THE COMMISSION'S NAIADES III PUBLICATION TO BOOST FUTURE-PROOF EUROPEAN INLAND WATERWAY TRANSPORT (IWT)

The sector is fully committed to deliver on the two main objectives of the Action Plan: the increased modal share and the transition towards zero emission

European IWT Platform - as an executive body of the European Barge Union (EBU) and the European Skippers Organisation (ESO), gladly joins EBU in its public statement on the successful NAIADES III publication. Since its creation by EBU and ESO, the European IWT Platform aims at a stronger positioning of Inland Navigation in European transport policies. The Platform, in cooperation with both founding parties, has been active in providing input to the European Commission during the drafting process.

Ambitious Action Plan accompanied by eight flagship measures

On the 24th of June, the European Commission published its NAIADES III program by putting forward an ambitious '*Inland Waterway Transport Action Plan 2021-2027*' in line with its Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. It focusses on two core objectives: shifting more freight transport to inland waterways, and setting the sector on an irreversible path to zero-emissions accompanied by a paradigm shift towards further digitalization, as well as accompanying measures to support the current and future workforce. The Communication is underpinned by eight flagship measures.

IWT is an enabler to absorb much higher volumes and to deliver the ambitions of the EU Green Deal

European IWT Platform welcomes the Communication and its concrete Action Plan. It supports the proposed focus, as well as the notion that the IWT sector needs to be reinforced to meet the Green Deal objectives in terms of modal shift and lower pollutants and Greenhouse Gas emissions. Keeping already a very positive environmental record today, the intended increase of the modal share of IWT will substantially contribute to an overall decrease of GHG emissions of transport. The IWT sector is prepared to take the necessary steps towards zero emission and to take over much higher volumes of freight and passengers on the waterways if the right framework conditions are met. To this end, on the 28th of June, the Platform has organised a webinar on opportunities and challenges in the context of IWT greening in a nearby future.

EBU's President, Mr Paul Goris, commented on the latest publication: "*We understand the NAIADES III communication as clear commitment from the European Commission to boost Inland Waterway Transport and to provide the necessary support to materialize its full potential*". It follows the previous pleas of the sector for:

- more investment in infrastructure by the Member States and much more funding out of the CEF for waterways,

- an increased share of Inland Waterway Transport by a full integration in the multimodal chain, creating the right regulatory framework and correcting imbalances, such as the long-lasting port congestion,
- supporting the energy transition of the sector via tailor made funding for the large-scale deployment of green technologies for the fleet, reliable alternative fuels and digitalization.

Strike the right balance

To support the sector in increasing its modal share, the Commission must strike the right balance between the ambition and the energy transition measures. In the attempt to boost the uptake of more sustainable transport modes, the Commission in the Action Plan intends to present a comprehensive set of measures – including emissions trading, infrastructure charges and energy taxes to ensure that the “*polluter pays*” principles are implemented across all transport modes.

Taking into account the very low externalities of the sector, the internalization of external costs and a possible emission trading system only would impose high administrative burdens on the sector and lead to a reverse modal shift.

Whereas in the EU Taxonomy Climate Delegated Act the low-carbon potential of the sector is recognized, EBU and IWT Platform however emphasize the need to improve the current technical screening criteria in order to make them adequate and in line with the criteria of other modes to create a level playing field. Currently, it is felt the criteria are neither adequate nor realistic.

Finally, it is obvious that where the Commission aims to encourage the take-up of renewable low-carbon fuels through tax incentives, the introduction of a harmonized EU minimum rate for the fuels used in IWT would violate international agreements and have contrary effects on the development of the modal share of IWT. The Action Plan should provide support to the industry to keep its role as frontrunner.

Strong Governance needed

Inland Waterway Transport is governed by different legal regimes, such as under the European treaties, the Mannheim Act, the Belgrade Convention and UN ECE treaties. This requires more than ever the recognition of the mutual benefits of each other’s legal work and a strong cooperation between the European Union and the other Organizations involved with the aim of jointly and effectively supporting IWT in Europe.

We are very pleased to witness the strong cooperation between the European Commission, all River Commissions and UNECE as laid down in the Communication to strengthen ever further the governance of the sector. The Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine in particular actively supports the collective work of the European Committee for drawing up Standards in the field of Inland Navigation (CESNI) and continues to play, in addition to its long-standing regulatory responsibilities on the Rhine, an essential role as centre of excellence and knowledge in the development of an appropriate legal framework for IWT in Europe. The ever-closer cooperation between the EU/EC and the other institutions will undoubtedly help bring IWT to the forefront of the new mobility policies essential for our sustainable development in Europe.

For more information, you can contact:

Ms Theresia Hacksteiner, Secretary General of EBU: t.hacksteiner@ebu-uenf.org

Mr Nik Delmeire, Coordinator of IWT Platform: n.delmeire@inlandwaterwaytransport.eu