SEMinar

the inland waterways of tomorrow on the european continent

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inland waterways in europe
rotterdam declaration

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Ladies and Gentleman,

The reinforcement of Pan-European inland waterway transport has been the reason for both The Netherlands and Romania to take the initiative for the Pan-European Conference on Inland Waterway Transport, which was held in Rotterdam on 5 and 6 September 2001. Transport Ministers of the Rhine- and Danube countries and representatives of several international organizations related to inland waterway transport attended the conference, as well as observers from the United States, China and Vietnam.

Both The Netherlands and Romania acknowledged the necessity of common effort to reinforce Pan-European inland waterway transport. Even now, there are still many unnecessary obstacles impeding a free passage. Not only physical, like infrastructural obstacles, but also legislative, like the lack of harmonisation of legislation and market access. Consciousness of the potentials of inland waterway transport by European politicians and policy makers is therefore necessary, especially since the expected growth of freight transport can be partially taken care of by inland waterway transport. After all, inland waterway transport is environmentally friendly, safe, efficient and just-on-time.
To achieve this goal, objectives and actions have been established in the Declaration of Rotterdam, which was signed by the Dutch Minister Netelenbos and her Romanian colleague Minister Mitrea on behalf of the conference-members. The Declaration is therefore politically binding for all countries and organizations who attended the conference.

It was not an easy job to draw up a Declaration which could count on the support of all parties involved. A working group was formed in which besides The Netherlands and Romania, also the Danube Commission, the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, the European Commission, the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations and of course the organizer of today, the European Conference of Minister of Transport participated. The Ministries of the European inland waterway transport countries were given the opportunity twice to comment the draft-versions of the Declaration, prepared by the working group.

The central objectives of the Declaration are:

- To foster the growth of inland waterway transport and increase its share in the transport of goods;

- To further improve the sustainability, safety and efficiency of inland waterway transport;

- To create a transparent and integrated Pan-European inland waterway transport market based on the principles of reciprocity, freedom of navigation, fair competition and equal treatment of the users of inland waterways.
The achieve these objectives, Pan-European co-operation between governments and international organisations must be intensified with a view to carrying out actions. Of the actions established in the Declaration, the most important are:

- To consider, whenever decisions on infrastructure are taken, whether better utilization of the existing inland waterway infrastructure or the construction or improvement of waterway infrastructure might be an alternative to the construction or improvement of infrastructure for other modes of transport.

- To invite governments concerned to establish a Pan-European River Information Services by the year 2005, based on standards to be drawn up in the framework of the European Union, the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations, the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine and the Danube Commission, since river information services contribute to safer and more efficient inland waterway transport.

- To consider whether the contribution by inland waterway transport to the infrastructural and external costs can be limited in case all transport modes are to contribute to covering these costs.

- To facilitate the exchange of qualified personnel between European countries, as a means, for example, to overcome the imbalances in the employment markets, provided that adequate professional and social standards are maintained.

So, in a nut shell, actions are agreed upon to remove obstacles, to promote inland waterway transport and to intensify Pan-European co-operation.

The next step that has to be made is the implementation of the Declaration of Rotterdam. Initiatives, like this seminar, have been taken, or are in process of being taken by various
international organizations to bring about concrete actions based on the Declaration. These actions are necessary to achieve the original goal: the reinforcement of Pan-European inland waterway transport.

I hope today we make some progress with the realization of this goal so that the inland waterways of tomorrow will be free of unnecessary obstacles, better utilized and even more safe, efficient, environmentally friendly and just-in-time than they are today.

Thank you for your attention.