Opening speech at the Workshop on Pan-European Co-operation towards a Strong Inland Waterway Transport: on the Move
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Welcome

Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow colleagues, welcome to this Workshop on Pan-European Co-operation towards a Strong Inland Waterway Transport: on the Move. It is an honour to speak to you today. I am delighted to see that all the international organisations which are active in inland navigation have joined forces to realise this workshop. I thank the European Conference of Ministers of Transport, the European Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Danube Commission and the Central Commission on the Navigation of the Rhine for their efforts.

The Ministerial Conference in Rotterdam was held 4 years ago and we have not sat still since 2001. This workshop is a good opportunity to look at what we have achieved and the new challenges that have arisen in the meantime, in anticipation of the Ministerial Conference in Bucharest in September 2006.

So let us look at how far we have got, discuss some of the concrete results, sketch the challenges we are facing and try to indicate how the sector itself feels about various topics, on the basis of the four sections of the Rotterdam Declaration.

But first I would like to say something about the development of inland shipping. The growth of inland navigation is partly dependent on the growth of the global trade volume. Although this was practically zero in 2001 and 2002, it has been picking up again since 2003 and is expected to show a growth of 5.5% in 2006. In theory, this means that business should improve for inland navigation, as well.

Incidentally, one sector, that of national and international container traffic, has resulted in spectacular growth in inland navigation lately. In Germany there was a doubling in the period from 1995 to 2003. Last year there was a growth of 38% in the north-south traffic between France and the Benelux countries. This was despite the fact that there were handling delays for inland waterway vessels in the seaports due to the growth in maritime container flows.

If we look at the whole Pan-European picture, we have an internationally classified waterway network of more than 16,000 kilometres available for inland navigation in the “Europe of the 25”. Inland waterway transport accounts for more than 210,000 million tonkilometres, with a fleet of about 12,000 motor vessels and tug-pushed barges. Approximately 80% of these tonkilometres are realised in the countries situated along the Rhine, while about 9% are realised on the Danube and the Rhine-Main-Danube connection. There are enormous possibilities for expansion here.
Section 1 Infrastructure

The Rotterdam Declaration states that the development of a modern, environmentally friendly, efficient network of waterways is a must for both the promotion of inland waterway transport and the improvement of sea and river transport.

I am particularly pleased that in France the planning of the Seine-Nord is being tackled with great speed. It is important for France, Belgium and the Netherlands because it will enable a shift in transport from road to water in the north - south corridor between the big ports of Paris, Antwerp, Rotterdam and Amsterdam. This connection has been given the status of TEN corridor and I feel that this is quite justified.

Within the framework of the ECMT, a study has been carried out into best practices so that infrastructure can be realised which takes other functions of water into account. After all, water has other functions: water supply and hydro power, to mention a few. This research will be presented during the session on infrastructure tomorrow.

The challenge now lies in tackling the necessary infrastructural projects while complying with the findings of the study. The Trans European Networks are, of course, particularly important, partly in view of the recent, and expected, expansion of the EU to the east. The Rhine-Main-Danube connection promptly springs to mind in this respect. In its National Action Plan, Austria has recently shown how it will be tackling the Danube to the east of Vienna. I trust that Germany will improve the bottleneck between Straubing and Vilshofen adequately, while taking the other functions of the river into account. This would give the east-west inland waterways route in Europe the most significant boost since the realisation of the Rhine-Main-Danube connection.

Incidentally, we have learned in the Netherlands that simply having a waterway network is not enough. A network can only be used if inland ports are realised, too. In the Netherlands, the added value of inland ports to the economy is almost as big as that of all our seaports put together. This is why, at the conference in Scheveningen, EU member states were called upon to share their knowledge on the development of intermodal nodes and to stimulate trade and industry to set up businesses at the waterside or close to an intermodal node. By “intermodal points”, I am referring to inland ports, terminals and logistic centres, of course.

Incidentally, within this framework, I believe that it is very important to base your infrastructural policy on transparent financial arguments. Decisions can only be taken if the added value can be compared with the costs. This is one of the most important conditions which have to be met if we are to look forward to political decision-making with confidence and sway public opinion in our favour. Only then will we be able to get sufficient financial resources released for managing and maintaining waterways and removing bottlenecks and, ultimately, achieving a high-quality network of waterways.

Apart from infrastructure itself, it is also important to improve our use of it. In 2001 the ministers responsible for inland navigation asked the governments involved to set up the Pan-European River
Information Services before 2005. I am pleased to say that this has been realised and that we adopted the European River Information Services Directive in the Council in 2004. The River Information Services will make a very significant contribution to the competitive strength of inland navigation. Not only will it greatly improve efficiency, but it will also take nautical safety even further. The fact that we have a Directive which lays down norms does not mean that we have made it. The most important thing now is to implement the River Information Services as broadly as possible, with the focus primarily on harmonisation and interoperability. National governments will be taking the lead in this implementation, but it is essential that the business community subsequently utilise the advantages to the full. By that I mean not only those providing the transport services, but those requiring the transport services, too. If the exchange of information between the various parties which are active in the different transport modalities is improved, goods can be transported more efficiently and therefore more profitably.

What does the business community think about all this? The European Barge Union and the European Skippers Organisation listed the top ten priorities of Inland Navigation to be supported by the European Union and national governments in their publication of last November. The first place went to the Inland Waterway Transport Policy Master Plan for freight transport and second place went to an excellent infrastructure and an extended European waterway network. The latter would include a European stimulation fund to remove bottlenecks and to realise the missing links within the Pan-European network. Incidentally, I wonder whether they are not conveniently ignoring the fact that infrastructure is not an EU task. The tasks which such a fund would have would therefore be practically non existent.

The business community also recognises the importance of the development of River Information Services because it makes Inland Navigation attractive to modern supply chain management.

Section 2 Harmonisation of legislation and access to the market

The request from the ministers in Rotterdam for the reinforcement of cooperation in terms of legislation was well received by the European Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and both River Commissions. This cooperation concerns the field of Pan-European harmonisation of technical, safety and manning regulations. In its top 10 priorities for 2004-2010, the sector rightly asks for the reduction of unnecessary administrative and financial burdens by harmonising legislation and technical requirements. A considerable success can be reported in this respect: in a joint working group of the European Commission and Central Commission for the Navigation on the Rhine, Directive 82/714 and the Regulation on Inspection of Shipping on the Rhine have been harmonised to enable the mutual recognition of certificates. This means that it will be possible to operate throughout the whole EU with a single certificate.
The European Union has, of course, recently been expanded with the accession of various inland navigation countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria is also in the pipeline.

Just this weekend, I heard the news that Turkey will formally apply for full membership of the Danube Committee at the moment of the revision of the Belgrade Act. The world of Inland Navigation is indeed expanding.

These developments have made the institutional issue in inland navigation more pressing. The EFIN (European Framework for Inland Navigation) report has given a boost to the discussion on the institutional frameworks. This issue has now been put at the top of the agenda, partly thanks to my colleague, Mr Karamitsos, of the Commission. He is also planning to include this topic in the Communication he is currently preparing. I would like to see this leading to far-reaching cooperation between the international regulatory organisations, within a year. This is my challenge to you. And then we will be able to look at our progress at the Ministerial Conference in Bucharest. In my opinion, it is essential that we improve this cooperation before we start talking about setting up a new institution.

In response to the appeal of Rotterdam, a group of volunteers within the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe listed the legal obstacles inland navigation is up against. But listing the obstacles does not make them go away. It is up to us to take up the challenge here. In this framework, it is gratifying to note that one of these obstacles has now been overcome: the Convention on the contract for the carriage of goods by inland waterways CMNI, has now gone into force. The Netherlands will be ratifying the convention towards the end of the year. At this point I would like to repeat the appeal made at the Ministerial Conference for your country to ratify the CMNI if it has not already done so. Another obstacle currently being tackled is a general, shared definition of the freedom of shipping on the Danube in the framework of the revision of the Belgrade Act. It will not come as a surprise to you when I say that I support the maximum possible stretching of this freedom. The negotiations on the mutual recognition of boatmasters’ licences have not been completed yet, either, but I am confident that they will be successful.

Those active in the sector see competitiveness and innovation as essential to economic development. They formulate this as “a level playing field in a liberalised market with fair competition”.

The business community is calling for the harmonisation of rules and regulations and the ratification of relevant international conventions. They think that the solution to the disparities in legal instruments and regulations is to be found in a European organisation for Inland Waterway Transport. This organisation would have autonomic competences to implement a coherent European Inland Waterway Transport policy. I support the sector in its aim of a level playing field, which would enable fair competition. As I have already said, I think that cooperation is important. And until cooperation has been realised, it is definitely not time to start talking about new institutions.
Section 3 Safety and sustainability

In 2001 the ministers felt obliged to call for the further development of safety norms and measures against water contamination, air pollution and noise nuisance.

I am happy to report progress in this field too: Belgium and France will soon be ratifying the Convention on Collection, Discharge and Reception of Waste arising from Rhine and Inland Navigation. If the convention has gone into force by the time “new” member states accede to the EU, the next step will be to enlarge its scope by enabling other countries to participate as well.

Inland navigation is a safe, efficient transport modality. There are, however, two reasons why we must work hard at lowering the environmental impact resulting from inland navigation:

1. to meet the EU Directives for air pollution and water quality, and
2. so that we do not lag behind the other continental modalities.

Air quality really must be improved. Air pollution is mainly due to emissions from engines. A substantial share of the total nitrogen oxides emissions in inland navigation countries, that is, between about 15% and 25%, results from inland navigation. European air quality norms are currently exceeded in several urban and industrial regions in Europe. These areas include the Rijnmond region here in the Netherlands, but also the Ruhr region in Germany, Northern Italy and cities such as Paris and Budapest. In the Netherlands, we have run into problems because of this. We have been unable to realise infrastructural projects in certain areas since further development would only make the situation worse. This risk also applies to waterways projects. I am now referring to constructing new waterways, but also to expanding the capacity of existing waterways. I am mentioning this because if an air quality bottleneck is spotted at an early stage, compensatory measures can be thought up. For instance compensation can be sought by leveling the emission with the reduction that is achieved through reduced road transport.

Limiting the environmental impact caused by inland waterway vessels is, and will always be, important. This is the only way inland navigation can continue to develop within the available environmental space and be a clean alternative for road transport. The European Directive 2004/26 for emissions from engines does not go far enough. We must tighten the norms after 2007, and preferably as quickly as possible. After all, we have to take into account the fact that it takes more than 20 years before norms for new engines are applied to all existing ships. I would therefore advise you to lay down a norm in 2012 which is just as strict as the Euro six norm for trucks. As far as I am concerned, we could simultaneously set a norm for 2016, to ensure that the emission of nitrogen oxides and fine dust are practically reduced to zero. For this norm it is important that the European norm for the sulphur content of fuels is further sharpened after 2008. Engine manufacturers and fuel suppliers can cope with this, as long as the norms are known long enough in advance. We are, after all, talking about the same technology as that used in trucks.

None of us can ignore it any more: the world is no longer the same since nine eleven and the recent attacks in Madrid and London. The Security Directive is on its way and it is also of great importance.
for inland navigation. In the new directive, security will be seen from the point of view of the whole transport chain. The challenge for us lies in good implementation, so that we can maximise the effect on safety while keeping the burden for the business community to a minimum.

The inland navigation sector’s attitude towards safety needs no further explanation; it is calling for the harmonisation of technical and safety norms based on the highest existing standards. The sector is, however, asking for incentives for the investments required for quicker installation of new engines in vessels. In the Netherlands we have responded to this request by setting up a subsidy scheme which was approved by the European Commission on 5 July 2005. The contribution depends on the size of the engine and amounts to a maximum of € 20,000 for an engine and € 200,000 for a catalytic converter.

As regards measures in the field of security, the sector requires mandatory measures based on the principle of proportionality on a European level to avoid distortion of competition.

**Section 4 Promotion**

The Ministerial Conference in 2001 called for measures to bring the advantages of inland navigation to the attention of the public and of the branch. This has been tackled in various ways, including by means of the conference we held last year in Scheveningen under the title “The Power of inland navigation”. This workshop can also be used to put inland navigation on the map.

The communication now under preparation by the European Commission suggests that a European network for the promotion and development of inland navigation be set up in the future. I think that this is an excellent idea. If you remember, a similar measure was taken for Short Sea Shipping and it gave the sector an enormous boost.

In short, there is a great deal going on regarding inland navigation at the moment. The title of this workshop could, therefore, not have been more appropriate: inland navigation really is on the move. I hope that you have a successful workshop and trust that you will be able to produce enough input for the Bucharest Declaration in the next two days.

Thank you for your attention.