

UNICE CONTRIBUTION

**FOR CONSULTATION MEETING ON THE FUTURE OF INLAND WATERWAY
TRANSPORT ON 4 DECEMBER 2001**

UNICE welcomes the initiative taken by the European Commission to consult economic circles on the future of inland waterway transport and the concrete steps to be taken to improve the quality and efficiency. In UNICE's view, inland waterway transport should be stimulated in tandem with other means of transport with a view to helping reduce costs for consumers and industry, and easing congestion and pollution problems.

Inland shipping has the potential to offer solutions for these problems. Since the liberalisation of the market of inland navigation, the sector has adjusted well to the new situation and has become more customer-oriented. In addition, a positive effect can be observed in innovations on the market.

Our contribution focuses on the five topics suggested by the Commission:

Infrastructure and network

It is essential for inland shipping to have a good waterway network. Without a good waterway network it is impossible to meet the logistics needs of Europe's industry and trade, and offer an alternative for road transport. Twenty-four hour use of inland waterways and operation of locks and bridges, including Sundays and holidays, must be possible in order to allow better competition with other modes of transport and to respond to the needs of industry and trade.

We see little progress in the actual development of the waterways TEN. In spite of the EU agreements on the development of trans-European networks there are no institutional means to commit national governments to the realisation of important TEN projects. It may be helpful to assign to the Commission a clearer role in coordinating TEN trans-border projects. National budgets should give higher priority to these projects. The financial means currently made available for the development of waterways infrastructure are insufficient.

Apart from investment in new waterways, the maintenance of existing waterways is in the short term an even bigger problem. Because of the lack of sufficient investment in maintenance of waterways and canals the use of many waterways is restricted. This means an economic disadvantage because vessels cannot be fully loaded. The investment in maintenance is often delayed because there is no storage location for the heavily contaminated sludge.

Intermodality and logistics

Intermodal transport involving inland navigation should be promoted through incentives from Member States for investments in terminals, quays and handling equipment for hauliers, ports and shipping companies, in order to lower the terminal costs. It should receive the same treatment as other intermodal techniques. Terminals should have good connections with the road network for the collection and distribution of containers.

Fleets and profession

Thanks to the scrapping programmes of the EC the number of active inland navigation vessels has decreased markedly. In particular, the number of vessels below 1,000 tonnes has gradually reduced. The availability of sufficient smaller inland navigation vessels is a growing problem. For several reasons UNICE fears that this problem will become worse in the near future:

- The need for small vessels will continue. Due to road congestion more and more shippers located along smaller waterways and canals are starting to use inland shipping.
- The investment of governments in upgrading smaller waterways and canals is lacking. Therefore shippers located along smaller waterways are bound to use small vessels for a long period.
- The average age of shipowners of small vessels is high and there is no succession. Therefore, in the near future a relatively large number of shipowners will leave the market.
- Among young people there is no willingness to enter the profession of inland shipping, especially not for small vessels.

UNICE fears that the scope for using inland navigation may remain limited due to a situation of under-capacity, combined with the old for new arrangement, which, in UNICE's view, should be abolished immediately, especially for small vessels. Businesses located on narrower waterways will over time transfer to road transport. UNICE fears that this situation of under-capacity will have a counterproductive effect for the modal shift policy. Shippers will be less inclined to transfer their goods flows from road transport to inland navigation. To take account of these capacity problems the demand side of the market is confronted with, UNICE calls for its representation (own account and users organisations) in the expert committee on inland waterway shipping.

Harmonisation of rules

UNICE supports the recently signed CMNI treaty on liability in inland navigation. The treaty sets out clear rules in cases of loss or damage to the goods. In this sense, the treaty creates more favourable circumstances for shippers to make use of inland waterway shipping. UNICE calls for rapid ratification of the treaty in national legislation. At the recently held Pan European Conference on inland waterway transport in Rotterdam, the ministers of transport in the Rhine and Danube countries signed a declaration on the harmonisation of legislation. UNICE supports the harmonisation of technical, safety and manning requirements in order to create a level playing-field.

Promotion and dissemination of information

Some Member States already have promotion bodies for inland waterway transport. It may be useful for others to follow. UNICE welcomes the initiative of INE, Inland Navigation Europe, and hopes this will stimulate the cooperation between the national bodies.

Member States should encourage shippers to make more use of inland waterway transport by facilitating investments by shippers and others in public and private terminals. Member States should also create more possibilities for industry and trade to make use of inland shipping by promoting construction of industrial sites near waterways.

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