



European Economic and Social Committee

TEN/248
Promotion of inland
waterway transport
"NAIADES"

Brussels, 14 September 2006

OPINION

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on the

Communication from the Commission on the promotion of Inland Waterway Transport
"NAIADES" - An Integrated European Action Programme for Inland Waterway Transport
COM(2006) 6 final

On 3 February 2006 the Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Communication from the Commission on the promotion of Inland Waterway Transport "NAIADES" - an Integrated European Action Programme for Inland Waterway Transport
COM(2006) 6 final.

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 4 September 2006. The rapporteur was Mr Simons.

At its 429th plenary session, held on 13 and 14 September 2006 (meeting of 14 September 2006), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 64 votes to two, with two abstentions.

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1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 It is imperative to strengthen the position of Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) by formulating a European inland navigation policy in the framework of the revised White Paper. The creation of a level playing field, the removal of the existing infrastructure and institutional bottlenecks, along with provision of the necessary political support, constitute the preconditions for the future development of this mode of transport.
- 1.2 The proposed *Integrated European Action Programme For Inland Waterway Transport* can be considered as a solid basis for the development of IWT. The proposed measures – taking also into account the EESC's comments on the proposal – need to be implemented without delay in order to exploit the full potential of this sector.
- 1.3 The EESC reproaches the Commission for failing to pay attention to the recommendations set out by the EESC in its opinion on social policy¹. When applying these recommendations, close, reciprocal coordination between the various DGs involved is essential in order to enable all relevant aspects to be properly considered and given full justice.
- 1.4 The legal framework for IWT in Europe has been broadly formulated by the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine (CCNR). With a view to improving the administrative and regulatory framework, the River Commissions for the Rhine and Danube,

¹ See OJ No C 24 of 31.1.2006.

in particular the CCNR, have already endeavoured to harmonise the laws governing manning requirements, vessels, boatmasters' certificates and liability. These River Commissions must, therefore, also be listed, as "responsible actors", in the tables of instruments set out in the Communication.

- 1.5 The EESC calls upon the European Commission not to subject the liability of carriers of passengers in inland waterways to a new regime, as proposed in the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the liability of carriers of passengers by sea and inland waterways in the event of accidents (COM(2005) 592). The EESC would refer in this context to its own-initiative opinion entitled "Towards a pan-European system of inland waterway transport" and would, however, recommend promoting the course of action pursued by the River Commissions, namely renegotiating the treaty which has already been concluded at international level in this field².
- 1.6 The *modal shift* towards inland shipping brings about not only an improvement in the environmental performances of the transport chain but also helps to achieve sustainable transport in general. Adequate financial and fiscal means must therefore be made available to promote investment in this transport sector and to enable all its potential to be exploited.
- 1.7 A constructive social dialogue must be entered into at European level as a means of mapping out a strategy for locating people who wish to work in inland shipping and for establishing comparable social conditions and working conditions in all EU Member States. There is also a need to invest in training and traineeships in inland navigation with a view to offering prospects and career possibilities to persons undergoing training.
- 1.8 IWT is a reliable, safe, environmentally-friendly and inexpensive mode of transport. In order to change traditional patterns, general awareness and knowledge of the real potential of this sector in terms of quality and reliability need to be promoted.
- 1.9 The proper maintenance of the infrastructure by Member States as well as the necessary financial support, together with the immediate realisation of the Inland Waterway Priority projects, as defined on the priority list of the TEN-Ts, need to be guaranteed, as does a maximum co-financing for these projects, as foreseen in the revised guidelines of the TEN-Ts. The appointment of a European Coordinator for the inland waterway projects, as defined in the TEN-T list of priority axes and projects (18. Rhine/Meuse-Main-Danube inland waterway axis and 30. Inland waterway Seine-Scheldt) must speed up the removal of the bottlenecks.
- 1.10 The EESC regards the creation of an appropriate institutional framework as an adequate instrument for implementing the proposed Integrated European Action Programme for IWT

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Strasbourg Convention on the Limitation of Liability in Inland Navigation (CLNI).

and reinforcing the position of IWT. In its recent own-initiative opinion³, the EESC recommended that endeavours be made to achieve the ultimate aim of establishing an independent organisation, enshrined in a treaty, which could embrace at least the international organisations, such as the EU itself, EU Member States involved in inland waterway transport and also non-EU states, such as Switzerland, and the non-EU Danube riparian states.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The European Union aims to develop an integrated transport policy in order to promote the movement of goods and persons quickly, efficiently, cheaply and in a sustainable way. This is a key aim in the light of the EU's goal of achieving a dynamic and competitive economy, as set out in the Lisbon Strategy, and in the light of the sustainable development strategy, defined at the Gothenburg Summit in 2001; in this context economic, environmental and social aspects have to be addressed on an equal footing.
- 2.2 In those areas where it exists, inland navigation offers numerous possibilities in terms of innovation, growth and capacity, environmental friendliness, safety and security. Besides, it has sufficient capacities to absorb the increasing freight streams in Europe and to help free Europe from permanent road congestion.
- 2.3 In its opinions of 16 January 2002 on "*The future of the trans-European inland waterway network*" and of 24 September 2003 entitled "*Towards a pan-European system of inland waterway transport*", the European Economic and Social Committee assessed the situation of inland waterway transport in Europe⁴. The second opinion examined the bottlenecks of inland waterway transport and addressed the need to harmonise rules in this field, in respect of both the public-law and private-law aspects. This opinion also tackled issues such as the environment, safety, the labour-market situation and social aspects. The latter issue is further expanded upon in the own-initiative opinion of September 2005 entitled "*Social policy within a pan-European system for regulating inland waterway transport*"⁵.

*The EESC has recently adopted an own-initiative opinion on "The institutional framework for inland waterway transport in Europe"*⁶; this opinion addresses the very issue of the public organisational structure – an issue which is left open in the Communication under review.

³ CESE 599/2006.

⁴ OJ C-80 of 3.4.2002 and OJ C-10 of 14.1.2004.

⁵ OJ C 24 of 31.1.2006.

⁶ OJ C 185 of 8.8.2006.

2.4 In its present Communication, the Commission has put forward an ambitious action programme for promoting inland shipping. Actions, based on an extensive survey, are proposed in five areas; taken together, these actions should bring about an improvement in the position of inland shipping, as such, and its position as part of the logistic chain.

2.5 The proposed actions cover the following fields:

- markets;
- fleet;
- jobs and skills;
- image; and
- infrastructure.

In a separate chapter, the Commission's Communication addresses the issue of the modernisation of the organisational structure, examining four options without coming out in favour of any given one.

In the chapters set out below, each of the abovementioned five actions, together with the issue of the modernisation of the organisational structure, will be addressed individually.

2.6 The action programme covers a wide range of measures, for which the European Union itself, the Member States and the business community⁷ should undertake concrete and, if necessary, concerted efforts. This coherent and open approach aims to contribute to a development of inland waterway transport, which itself contributes to a sustainable development of the European Transport policy.

3. **General comments**

3.1 The establishment and maintenance of a level playing-field between modes of transport and between Member States is a precondition for the proper functioning of an internal market, in which IWT is liberalised and fully competitive.

3.2 IWT is seen as a way of achieving a more balanced transport market. In order to be able to exploit the full potential of this mode, a number of obstacles need to be removed which are currently impeding the full development of the sector. Obstacles are encountered, in particular, in the fields of infrastructure and the development of the Trans-European Networks, as well as in relation to the lack of legal and institutional harmonisation and unification of IWT.

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In this opinion, the term "the business community" is deemed to include, amongst others, employers, self-employed persons and employees working in this sector.

3.3 In the Communication under review, the European Commission has recognised the need to promote inland shipping and has therefore drawn up an integrated action programme, placing particular emphasis on the concrete measures which are necessary in order to make optimal use of the market potential of this mode of transport and to increase its attractiveness. The Commission's proposals are welcomed by the EESC which regards them as constituting a positive contribution towards resolving transport problems and positioning inland shipping accordingly.

3.4 The EESC is disappointed to note the absence of any proposals in respect of social policy. In the own-initiative opinion which it adopted on this subject in 2005, the EESC put forward a number of concrete recommendations. The EESC strongly urges that this gap be bridged along the lines described in the abovementioned own-initiative opinion.

4. **Specific comments**

4.1 **Markets**

4.1.1 To support entrepreneurship in the inland waterway sector, the necessary circumstances and favourable conditions must be created, that enable the proper functioning of the industry and guarantee a level playing field, as regards economic, environmental and social considerations, vis-à-vis other transport sectors. As a consequence, a better coordination of all relevant public services and policies must streamline the necessary formalities.

4.1.2 In order to make the market more attractive to newcomers and at the same time enable existing businesses to extend, fiscal incentives must be used to stimulate (re-)investment. These incentives should include, in particular, the proposed actions and instruments, mainly in the field of state aid guidelines and EU RTD, aimed specifically at inland navigation. It is the high investment costs that may hamper the expansion and renewal of the sector.

4.1.3 The legal framework of Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) in Europe has been broadly developed by the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine (CCNR). To improve the administrative and regulatory framework, the River Commissions for the Rhine and the Danube, mainly the CCNR, have already undertaken efforts to harmonise the legislation for manning, vessels, boatmasters' certificates and liability and must be listed as "responsible actors" in the tables of instruments set out in the Communication⁸.

4.1.4 In this context, attention is also drawn to the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the liability of carriers of passengers by sea and inland waterways in the event of accidents (COM(2005) 592 final). In submitting this proposal for a

⁸ Attention is drawn to the call made by the EESC in its own-initiative opinion on social policy for adequate consultations, including by the River Commissions.

Regulation, the European Commission is seeking to introduce the same system of liability in respect of carriers of passengers by both sea and inland waterways.

4.1.5 These two modes of transport do, however, differ to such an extent that differing provisions are required in order to take account of the specific conditions applying to these two modes of transport. The overall limit in respect of liability in IWT is currently regulated by an international treaty⁹ with a view to raising this limit, negotiations are at present taking place, under the leadership of the River Commissions, on amendments to the Convention. These amendments also seek to extend the field of application of the Convention, currently confined to the Rhine riparian states, to include the other IWT States in Europe.

4.1.6 Referring to its own-initiative opinion entitled "Towards a pan-European system of inland waterway transport", the EESC therefore recommends that this line of negotiation be continued.

4.2 **Fleet**

4.2.1 Inland vessels are characterised by long lifetime. Therefore fleet innovation and modernisation need support through programmes that facilitate adaptation to new technical standards, and which are based on state aid guidelines. RTD- and support programmes specifically for inland navigation must be provided to support the most important innovation needs in the sector and to adapt the existing fleet to new environmental and safety and security standards.

4.2.2 Inland navigation is a mode of transport which, against the background of a growing transport market, can offer a means of tackling the problem of congestion on the roads and can, by virtue of its safety record and environmentally friendly nature, help to bring about a sustainable solution to the transport problem. Emission standards, fuel quality, noise protection and treatment of ship waste have always been important issues to the business community. Currently, new methods to further reduce emissions even in the next decade are being discussed by ship operators, engine producers and authorities. Inland shipping holds a positive record regarding environmental performance compared to other modes of transport and aims to keep this position. The sector is committed and should be further encouraged to move forward on emission-low concepts in order to maintain its environmentally friendly image.

4.2.3 The benefits from inland navigation are the result of the overall concept and advantages of inland shipping in terms of congestion, maintenance and use of infrastructure, accidents and other relevant elements. Modal shift to inland shipping therefore does not only contribute to an improvement of the environmental performance of the transport chain but also to the development of a sustainable transport system in general.

⁹ Strasbourg Convention on the Limitation of Liability in Inland Navigation (CLNI).

4.2.4 Inland navigation plays an important role in the intermodal transport chain. As alternative to road transport, the further development of intermodal concepts deserves full support. Whereas these concepts already have been developed in the past years in the field of container transport, additional measures need to be undertaken in order to fully exploit the possibilities of intermodal transport involving a.o. inland navigation.

4.2.5 In concrete terms, centres of loading or discharging need to be located along rivers. Existing and new ports must be developed as intermodal ports. The efficiency of port infrastructure and excellent fairway conditions, a.o. sufficient height of bridges along the rivers and canals, largely determine the efficiency of intermodality.

4.3 **Jobs and skills**

4.3.1 Inland navigation is a highly professional sector. It requires increasing professional skills in the nautical and technical field as well as regarding security, information and communication technologies (ICT) and logistics. The education needs to be adapted to the advanced demands in order to realise and encourage a future-oriented profession. Standardisation of education and training concepts comparable to standards in maritime transport can contribute to further professionalise mainly in the field of transport of dangerous goods. Programmes of recruitment, education and training need to be developed to attract young people in the sector and maintain the necessary skills.

4.3.2 There must be a constructive social dialogue at European level to develop a strategy designed to: make working in ILT an attractive proposition; find suitable people wishing to work in this sector; and create equivalent working and social conditions throughout the Member States of the EU.

4.3.3 As already mentioned, it is the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine (CCNR) that has developed the legal framework of IWT in Europe to a high extent. Harmonisation of manning requirements and boatmasters' certificates also is dealt with by the CCNR and the Danube Commission. Together with the European Commission, the River Commissions should work on further unification in this field.

4.3.4 The application of the national social legislation should be controlled more severely. The Commission should promote the coordination among the controlling authorities of Member States. With regard to this subject, special attention should be given to ship hotels.

4.3.5 Whilst referring to its own-initiative opinion entitled "Social policy within a pan-European system for regulating inland waterway transport", the EESC takes the view that the European Commission is the body, par excellence, for driving social policy, in the broad sense of the term, at the same time also capitalising on the long tradition, experience and expertise

acquired by the CCNR and the Danube Commission, which have, indeed, also paid heed to social policy.

4.4 **Image**

- 4.4.1 Inland navigation is a reliable, safe, environmental friendly and cheap mode of transport. To change traditional patterns going in the opposite direction, general awareness and knowledge of the real potential of the sector in terms of quality and reliability need to be promoted.
- 4.4.2 By monitoring trends and developments within the sector and releasing them amongst the key role players, the already introduced Market Observation System might play a crucial role. With support from the River Commissions and the business community, the European Commission must provide the necessary information.
- 4.4.3 On the other hand, the establishment and support of promotion centres can be seen as a means of spreading the relevant sector information to the business community, which - to be successful - has to translate the sectors' possibilities, under the governance and supervision of the professional organisations.

4.5 **Infrastructure**

- 4.5.1 The recent flooding in states situated on the Danube has, once again, revived the discussion on the question of environmentally responsible infrastructure measures. A report commissioned by the German authorities following the flooding along the Elbe in 2003 showed that inland shipping in no respect contributed to the situation which had arisen and was therefore not to blame for the flooding and the consequences of this phenomenon.
- 4.5.2 The functioning of freight and passenger transport depends on an excellent infrastructure. The proper maintenance of the existing waterway infrastructure, the removal of the major bottlenecks and the construction of the missing links are a sine qua non. Consideration also needs to be given to revitalising outdated infrastructure.
- 4.5.3 The trans-European transport network has been declared a key element in the relaunched Lisbon strategy for competitiveness and employment in Europe. Only two out of the 30 priority projects are, however, inland waterway priority axes, nr. 18. Rhine/Meuse-Main-Danube inland waterway axis and nr. 30. Inland waterway Seine-Scheldt.
- 4.5.4 Following the adoption of the EU budget for the period 2007-2013, the allocations proposed by the European Commission for the TEN-Ts have been considerably reduced. With a view to avoiding jeopardising the planned co-financing of designated inland waterway projects, the EESC calls upon the EU Member States concerned to make a start, without delay, on carrying out the activities defined in the TEN-Ts.

4.5.5 The EESC also calls upon the European Commission to follow the examples set in respect of railway projects by appointing a coordinator for the two inland waterway projects; the person appointed should be able to play both a coordinating and stimulating role.

4.5.6 The EESC awaits the publication of the process announced by the Commission in connection with infrastructure charging.

4.6 **Modernisation of the organisational structure**

4.6.1 One of the main outcomes of recent investigations in the sector, set out in the report of the European Framework for Inland Navigation (EFIN) entitled "A new institutional framework for [the] European Inland Navigation" and in the Prospects for Inland Navigation in an Enlarged Europe (PINE) report commissioned by the European Commission, proved that the impact of inland waterway transport at political level is comparably low and its strategic policy management is insufficient. Therefore the EESC recently took the initiative to draw up an own initiative opinion on The Institutional framework for inland waterway transport in Europe¹⁰. For the sake of brevity, reference is made here to this opinion.

Brussels, 14 September 2006.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Anne-Marie Sigmund

Patrick Venturini

¹⁰ Own-initiative opinion of the EESC on The Institutional framework for inland waterway transport in Europe – CESE 599/2006.