

SHORT STATEMENT TO THE REPORT FROM THE HIGH-LEVEL GROUP II Extension of the major trans-European transport axes to the neighbouring countries and regions

The horizontal approach in the high-level group report is positive. Faced with the current transport challenges, public infrastructure management can no longer be an aim in itself. To take account of user needs in terms of safe, secure and reliable mobility options, the creation of optimal framework conditions is also required to ensure improved asset utilisation, interoperability and consistent service levels. INE would like to point at the EC NAIADES programme as an example of coherent policy. INE appreciates ambitious policy views but calls above all upon involved parties to regularly take stock of real progress made. Secondly, a clear budget commitment is a condition sine qua non to deliver tangible results on the fixed objectives.

Inland waterways on the increase

In the nineties inland waterway transport has resumed with a trend of growth in a series of countries after decades of decline. The steady growth in usage over the last 10 years confirms the demand to relieve congested areas for moving freight. Inland waterway transportation is multimodal by excellence, requiring pre and post haulage by road to deliver goods to the final customer. All-in packages are offered by a growing number of forwarders, ship and terminal operators to organise door-to-door transport. The main demand factors for shippers to opt for barge transport both for bulk and fast moving consumer goods are cost-effectiveness on long and short distances, reliability in the supply chain and the opportunity to reduce CO2 emissions.

Do the five main transport axes highlighted in the High-Level Group (HLG) report, in your view, represent the main axes for international traffic and what would you add/delete, if given the opportunity and why?

The five main transport axes highlighted in the High Level Group report do reflect the main axes of international traffic and (potential) business relations between the enlarged EU and its neighbours. The identified axes that are external to the EU complement the trans-European transport network as adopted in April 2004. Economic growth within the Community and sound relations with third countries require a sustainable and international transport system within and outside the Community. The strategic perspective that the High-Level Group has chosen is therefore to be welcomed.

Several inland waterway networks in third countries have close connections to the EU inland waterway system. Particular attention should be paid to the development of the waterway systems in Serbia and Croatia. The rivers Drava, Sava, Tisa and Begej, as well as the Novi Sad-Savino Selo Canal, the Becej-Bogojevo Canal and the Palanka-Becej Canal bear large potentials as a feeder network for the Danube waterway. Waterway and port infrastructure require modernisation and investment in these areas, combined with targeted transport development initiatives to allow a balanced transport system.



Furthermore, the exchange of cargo between the shortsea shipping market and inland waterways in river-sea ports requires our full attention. Ports like Constantza have the potential to attract significant parts of overseas trading volumes from Asia to Europe, which have shown two-digit growth figures in the last decade. Asian deep sea carriers leaving the Suez Channel nowadays usually choose the northern route to Rotterdam, Antwerp and Hamburg in order to reach the European market. Given current port congestion in north-western Europe, the strong economic growth of south-eastern European economies, as well as the evidently shorter route from Suez to Constantza, this corridor will be of strategic importance for Europe's economic future. The river Danube can be effectively mobilised to extend the hinterland of Constantza even up to Austria.

The HLG report outlines a number of measures, on so-called horizontal issues, are these the most important ones and do the recommendations made by the Group help to solve the problems?

In order to remove administrative barriers, the Group made recommendations regarding customs modernisation, harmonisation of transport documents and one-stop administrative procedures. The issues raised cover major issues in this field. Next steps should be aimed at defining the required initiatives. For inland waterway transport, the European NAIADES Integrated European Action Programme for Inland Waterway Transport (COM (2006)6 final) takes stock of the main priorities:

- Transport rights/reciprocal access to inland waterways
- Manning requirements
- Vessel certificates (environmental, safety standards)
- Boatmasters' certificates

Harmonisation of these issues will lead to fairer competition, safer working conditions, and more efficient operations.

Taking into account the directive 2005/44/EC (on harmonised river information services (RIS) on inland waterways in the Community) of the European Parliament and the Council, compatibility of traffic information systems on a pan-European basis should be guaranteed by using common standards. Additionally, the integration of relevant third countries in the IRIS Masterplan provides a major contribution to the creation of such a compatible network of RIS-based applications.

Apart from the main and well-known issues, INE wants to highlight the adverse effect of a variety of interfering rules from other competence fields at European, national and regional level. INE stresses the importance of identifying the administrative bottlenecks, at whatever level, hampering international inland waterway transport. It is important to reduce the legislative and administrative burdens, which hit SMEs harder than large companies discouraging the development of new freight concepts. INE recommends Member States to appoint national focal points as soon as possible, and calls upon all stakeholders to participate in the fact-finding process and to contribute to the streamlining of all relevant formalities and procedures resulting in a transparent and efficient regulatory environment.



Financing transport investments is a headache. How can the implementation of these axes and horizontal measures be best financed? What could be the role of the private sector and the user charges?

Waterway infrastructure maintenance and development primarily remains a sovereign field of competence. INE would like to stress the crucial importance of national and European funding for inland waterway projects with an international dimension. The implementation of many priority projects can be reached with relatively limited financial means. Instead of simply ducking out of spending on necessary infrastructure works, INE invites Member States not to see infrastructure as an aim in itself. Public investment in waterways acts as a magnet for private investment in freight platforms, enhancing a better integration of transport modes and attracting value added logistics activities, which lead to job creation and sustainable distribution solutions.

Moreover, the particular advantage of waterways is that they are much more than a ready transport means. They are multi-purpose assets at the heart of human activity turning investment into an opportunity to valorise the entire water environment through win-win projects combining transport, eco-restoration, flood defence, recreation, water supply, etc.

This rich but complex reality explains why user charging to finance international waterway infrastructure will not be the way to go. Apart from the principle of freedom of navigation on both Rhine and Danube, some fundamental methodological issues should be raised. The marginal cost principle cannot be transferred to inland navigation, since it will prove to be practically infeasible to determine the impact of one additional vessel on inland waterway infrastructure costs. If user charges are to be introduced, INE advocates that all relevant stakeholders first hold an in-depth debate on the policy objectives to be achieved by user charging on waterways.

For the implementation and coordination of the recommended actions, the report calls for either a memorandum of understanding or an international agreement – do these help to achieve the objectives? If not, how would you ensure the implementation and coordination of the actions?

Memoranda of Understanding can help to achieve the objectives and to implement the recommended actions. For efficiency reasons, existing frameworks of cooperation between EU and third countries should be exploited as much as possible. The main fields of cooperation in the area of inland navigation to be included in Memoranda of Understanding would be:

- Waterway infrastructure maintenance and development: defining cooperation between EU and third countries especially in the fields of surveying, maintenance, reconstruction, rehabilitation, upgrading and integrated waterway engineering taking into account European legislation and standards.
- Information Technology: cooperation on the implementation of harmonised River Information Services (RIS), continuing the fruitful work undertaken on the basis of the RIS Directive and the IRIS Masterplan.
- Multimodal Services: actively promote the development of multimodal services between EU Member States, by removing market imperfections and lowering the administrative thresholds for using waterway transport, considering the large potential and economic dynamics of south-eastern Europe.



- Promotion and Development Activities: cooperation in order to promote the stronger use of the inland waterway transport by the European industry within the framework of the objectives of the European transport policy. Effective promotion covers matchmaking between market players, acting as a catalyst for innovation opportunities and as a counselor for user-oriented policy measures. The example of the existing promotion offices shows this type of pragmatic work delivers results.

The Group has envisaged integrating the existing agreements and memoranda of understandings into a coherent framework. Should an international treaty be envisaged for this?

The creation of an international treaty is ambitious and could contribute to the achievement of the objectives. However, such a treaty can easily become an aim in itself.

Therefore, an incremental bottom up approach needs to be initiated in parallel to bring cooperation into practice. Incremental steps forward should be preferred over high ambitions that carry the danger of hampering the real progress due to political reasons. An alternative and possibly more effective approach would be to foster cooperation in the above-mentioned fields of cooperation.

As a flanking measure, INE calls upon the Commission to regularly take stock of real progress made, to define clear budget commitments and apply a time frame to develop inland waterway transport.

Cooperation in the field of inland waterway transport can take the form of

- Regular exchange of information on infrastructure and policy measures related to inland navigation
- Exchange of experts in areas of mutual interest
- Education and training activities for joint projects and initiatives
- Mutual technical assistance and implementation of cooperative projects
- Joint research and development for the development of sound and competitive inland waterway transport.