

SECTORAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEE **ON** **INLAND WATERWAY TRANSPORT**

Joint sectoral contribution to the Commission's Consultation On the future of transport

The sectoral social dialogue committee on Inland Waterway Transport wants to take the opportunity to present its contribution to the Communication on "A sustainable future for transport: Towards an integrated, technology-led and user friendly system".

General Remarks

Inland waterway transport is a very specific branch of the transport sector and faces a number of great challenges.

The current laws and regulations applicable to the industry are very complex and not always unambiguous, for instance in the area of social security and applicability of labour legislation.

The present economic and financial crisis has a severe impact on the sector. Total volume has dropped to an alarmingly low level. Some commodities saw their volumes drop by 70%. Passenger transport was however hit less severely as freight transport. The impact of the crisis is doubled because of the many new ships ordered well in advance to meet the increasing transport demand are being delivered at a moment of over-capacity. This led to a race to the bottom regarding freight rate. Some even accepted freight at a loss. Measures should be installed by the European Union in order to:

- ensure that skilled labour does not leave the industry
- ensure that financial support by public banks is available to the sector.

Even with the more optimistic views of some economists, European Inland Waterway Transport does not forecast a full recovery before 2014 (Dutch Ministry of Transport).

In paragraph 53 of the Communication it says (3rd sentence): ...*"depend on the capacity to adapt to innovation..."*. Inland Waterway Transport wants to adapt to innovation, and wants to lower its environmental impact and modernise. However renewing a complete fleet or even ordering one single new ship takes up years. And we do want to mention the huge investment that is needed to build a new ship equipped with all the latest IT equipment.

Compared to other modes of transport, Inland Waterway Transport is not especially favoured in spite of the intentions of the White Paper regarding stimulating environmentally clean transport modes, as IWT is. Some transport modes can quietly transfer their losses to society and reclaim transport capacity; others have a powerful political lobby. We don't consider this to be a fully transparent, level playing field, sustainable transport policy.

The Vienna Summit gave birth to NAIADES and stated that the human factor is one of the main pillars of the sector and of transport in general. It is important that this human factor is properly validated.

In order to make the Inland Waterway Transport an attractive alternative to road transport additional incentives need to be deployed.

The Social Partners in Inland Waterways Transport – the social challenge

To attract and retain young, skilled and also female workers to the sector is a major challenge the industry faces. Modern living and working conditions are essential components in confronting this challenge as an inland navigation vessel is both a workplace and a home to the crews, whether employers or employees. The time spent on board and the working hours may be relatively long, factors which can make the reconciliation of work with family life difficult.

Within the NAIADES programme, the Social Partners in Inland Waterways Transport cooperate actively in the various PLATINA-projects. They contribute continually to the ongoing discussions and negotiations on:

- working time,
- working and living conditions on board,
- professional profiles,
- harmonisation of boat masters' certificates and
- harmonisation of manning requirements.

In the area of recruitment and retention, training and professional qualifications also play a major role in helping young people decide on training to work in the industry. To assist in this EDINNA, a recently established European platform for Education in Inland Navigation, has proposed to establish unified standards of training and certification in inland navigation.

Paragraph 53 also mentions that social protection and public services should provide a safety net to facilitate the adjustment. Paragraph 54 adds: *"It must also be ensured that working conditions are maintained or improved. Differences in rights and social conditions between Member States should not result in a race to the bottom and become a factor of competitiveness with the increasing cross-border mobility of transport workers."* With this the communication touches upon the very heart of a specific problem facing the industry.

Inland Waterways Transport is a de facto cross border activity resulting in a very complex situation, both for the workers and employers concerned.

Labour Mobility, social standards and equal treatment

The freedom of establishment is indeed one of the economic pillars of the European Union, but workers in the EU do not enjoy a similar freedom. Many of them have to accept what they get offered in employment and social conditions. Regrettably the following phenomena still exist in the European labour market for qualified IWT-personnel:

- non *bona fide* companies recruiting workers to work below the applicable minimum wage.
- *bona fide* companies establishing subsidiaries in Member States without specific social regulation for Inland Waterway Transport.

The EU regulation 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems that will enter into force in May 2010 does not take into account this particularity and is thus not equipped for the trans-national nature of the daily work in Inland Waterway Transport. We consider it essential to create a transparent EU legislation for the industry assuring a uniform legal and social security system applicable to all crewmembers on board of the same vessel.

Since living and working on board of a vessel is living within a very tight community where safety is an issue of good communication between everyone working on board, equal treatment is essential to all crew members. Equal social, training and working conditions for all workers on the same ship, regardless their nationality, is the key to success.

For the social partners within the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Inland Waterway Transport it is clear that we need:

- clarity and transparency
- real social protection
- equal treatment of all crew members of a ship.

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