

The Integration of Inland Waterway Transport into the Economy.

Response of the European Federation of Inland ports to the Discussion Paper in view of the Non-Ministerial Conference in Esztergom

The European Federation of Inland Ports (EFIP) is the official voice of nearly 200 inland ports in 19 countries of the EU, Switzerland, Moldova and Ukraine. Given the important role inland ports play in the European Transport System as nodal point in the inland transport network combining road, rail, maritime and inland waterway transport, EFIP wants to submit the following comments to the discussion paper for the non-Ministerial Conference of the Hungarian Presidency.

European inland ports are the “inland waterway station” by excellence for getting freight on and off the waterway. Since most of European inland ports are not only linking water with road but also with railways, inland ports are facilitating the integration of inland waterway transport into the modal transport chain.

Taking into consideration the reality of economic and transport flows it is clear that a sustainable but efficient transport policy cannot be based on one mode. A 100% shift to inland waterway transport is not realistic. “Integration” is the codeword to boost the potential of IWT. Integrating the different transport modes implies in the first place the creation and further development of efficient interfaces. Freight transport users, shippers need a “market place” where they can make choices, they can combine in function of the product, the destination, the client, the cost (both internal and external). European inland ports are very well placed and ready to take up this function of “transport market place”.

In essence, European inland ports have a triple function:

- Comodal Hub on the European Inland Waterway Corridors: inland ports serve as efficient transshipment nodes on the European inland waterway corridors. They are the interface between the IWT and maritime leg and the other land modes of transport.
- Ideal business platform for the region: inland ports are functioning as the nodal point for the regional economy. Being at the crossroad between different transport modes, they often attract important businesses and suppliers of goods and services for the regional economy. Next to their transport and logistic function – and because of this function – they become an ideal location for businesses who want to be close to the market and the European transport corridors.

- An efficient bridge between sustainable long distance transport and the urban last mile: inland ports situated in an EU capital or major urban agglomeration make it possible to bring the urban freight by water right into (or near to) the city centres, limiting as such the road transport to the “last mile”. By exploiting the potential of a city inland port, the urban freight avoids the congestion barrier around the big agglomerations and limits the use of road transport to a minimum.

For these reasons the European Federation of Inland Ports strongly believe that inland ports play a major role in integrating inland waterway transport into the economy.

Question 1: What can be done at EU-level to foster the role of inland ports as nodal points in the logistic chain in Europe?

- The first and probably most important way of enhancing the role of inland ports as nodal point in a comodal transport and logistic chain is to recognise that inland ports are “important nodes” both in the comprehensive and core network of the new TEN-T network. Considering the aims of the TEN-T review (i.e. completing the “network”, better linking east and west, considering climate change and emphasis on the nodes), it is time that the inland ports are recognised as a *conditio sine qua non* for exploiting the potential of IWT and integrating inland waterway transport into the comodal transport chain and the economy in general.
- A long term, and above all European vision/strategy on the future development and investments to be made on European inland waterways, that is fully supported by all Member states involved, would allow inland ports to draw up ambitious, sustainable and strong investment plans. Such a long term and stable strategy is also the best way to attract new investments in the inland ports and in the inland waterway sector in general.
- The potential of an inland waterway corridor depends largely of the availability of efficient, well connected and well equipped inland ports. But to play their role, inland ports need “space”. The use of inland waterway transport implies the need of space along the river to access the waterway, to load and unload, to shift from one mode to another and to offer the logistic services needed to make waterborne transport a competitive alternative for road transport. Inland ports are also often “urban” ports. In that respect they are often faced with competition from other urban functions (real estate, recreation,...) for the limited space available at the waterside.
- The lack of knowledge and expertise on intermodal transport solutions mistakenly feeds the image of intermodal transport as a complex and costly solution. It is therefore important that shippers and businesses are making their way to intermodal transport solutions including inland waterway transport. This implies that the companies can count on experts (in-house or external) setting up a competitive, sustainable and reliable transport chain for their company/client.
- Calculating the correct price of externalities of all modes and means of transport and taking these externalities into account in the transport costs will help transport users in finding transport alternatives that are best for the economy and the environment. This will benefit the use of

waterborne transport. It must however be clear that the internalisation of external costs should only be used to make transport modes more comparable for the user, not as an instrument to increase the overall cost of transport. The internalisation should only relate to the external costs and has to be distinguished very clearly from the infrastructure costs.

- Some inland ports are also open to short sea shipping (SSS). To stimulate short sea shipping on the inland waterway network (coasters), the network should eliminate infrastructure bottlenecks that exist for this type of vessels: the height of bridges, the dimensions of locks, the creation of dedicated berths for short sea vessels in the hinterland. The hinterland connections, including infrastructure and equipment up to the inland terminals, should be an integral part of the so-called “Motorways of the seas”. Market information about potential new SSS links to the hinterland should be easily made available by the short sea promotion centres.

Question 2: What measures need to be taken to fully exploit the potential of River Information Services, so that RIS not only supports navigational decisions of the skipper and traffic management, but also services for modern supply chain management?

The European Federation of Inland Ports encourage the development of Intelligent Transport systems (ITS) fully.

Considering the role of inland ports as co-modal nodal points in the inland transport chain, EFIP highlights the importance of the interoperability of intelligent transport systems and new technologies across the different transport modes. The harmonisation of the technological systems is the key to making intermodal transport a success and are thus, next to the “hard” infrastructure an important element of the TEN-T network.

Moreover, Inland ports believe that a modern supply chain management needs transparent information among all modes. The information that seems useful in that respect is: status of loading, actual position of vessel, expected time of arrival,... Getting this information in time, would enhance the smooth functioning of the inland ports. It would allow inland ports to plan a slot time for the gantry crane, to plan the container check/repair,...

The use of advanced ITS solutions implies however an investment for the barge owners and operators. For small barges (ex. Freycinet type barges) such an investment can become a problem. Besides, barge operators are often considering these ITS systems as a way to control their operations and are reluctant to share data that are commercially sensitive. As a result, a further development and use of ITS should take into account this double concern of 1) financial implications and 2) confidentiality.

Question 3: What actions shall be taken at national and European level to improve the fairway conditions? How the environmental impact of infrastructure improvements on inland waterway shall be addressed within an overall transport network assessment?

The European Infrastructure policy should be considered as the backbone of the Common European Transport policy. As a result, the transport and infrastructure policy of the Member States should build on and reinforce the strategy developed at European level. It is only in that way that a smooth and fully integrated European transport chain can be developed.

By their nature, the European inland waterways cross different Member States and should be considered as natural parts of Europe's transport infrastructure. For this reason it is of paramount importance that the national policies governing the waterway transport infrastructure take into account the European and cross border importance of the inland waterway fairway that is crossing their territory.

EFIP pleads for a stable medium and long term waterway transport infrastructure strategy, allowing the inland ports and other potential investors to make the necessary choices. Planned and agreed investments or funding schemes may not be put into question.

The European inland ports recognise that the development and use of inland waterway infrastructure must take place in full respect of the European environmental legislation. It is however unacceptable to use the European environmental legislation as a tool to constantly challenge permit granting procedures. The permit granting procedures should therefore provide clear rules on how and within which time limits projects have to be agreed on. Given approvals shouldn't be questioned afterwards. Moreover the challenge of one part of a project of European interest, blocking the development of the whole project, should be dealt with at cross border or European level if needed.

Question 4: How could the EU better support the technical development and modernisation of the inland navigation fleet?

The modernisation of the inland navigation fleet is important but this must go hand in hand with the modernisation of the port infrastructure and the development of the inland waterway fairway, where needed.

Projects and initiatives looking into new technological solutions in the field of inland waterway transport (ex. accessibility of small waterways, barges equipped with a crane,...) should gain the full support.

EFIP opposes however a too mandatory modernisation scheme that would face barge owners with enormous investments. The modernisation has to be based on voluntary schemes and has to be adapted to the needs of the market. Overinvestments and too ambitious barge renewal schemes could have an adverse effect on the further development of the inland waterway transport in Europe. Moreover, adequate information on the possibilities of financing of new barges is needed.

Question 5: what measures could be taken at EU level to counteract this trend through an improvement of social standards and training programs or other?

Once it is clear that the inland waterway transport sector in Europe has a future (see the response to the previous questions), it will attract people to invest in this sector and will attract young people to work in the sector.

The long learning period (ex. 3 years on French inland waterways and 4 years on the Rhine) to become a captain makes it very costly for barge operators to invest in new people. Without giving in on quality and security, the length and modalities of this training should be reconsidered.

In some areas, especially on the Danube, there is a shortage of education centers. To foresee one education vessel for the whole Danube region could be a solution.