



PRESS RELEASE OF THE IWT AND PORTS SECTOR

Creating a high-quality waterway network requires a predictable EU budget

The Inland Waterway Transport and Ports sector plays a critical role in sustaining Europe's economic vitality and its climate and environmental goals. Inland waterway transport is serving major industries across Europe. It provides reliable and efficient transport solutions for heavy industries, consumer goods, urban deliveries, construction and more. A robust inland waterway ecosystem is essential to fostering industrial and commercial success, supporting and attracting industries critical to European prosperity and resilience. The Inland Waterway Transport and Ports sector urges policymakers, industries, and citizens to recognise the unique value of inland waterway transport. Together, we can ensure its role in a competitive, sustainable and resilient Europe.

Major industries and consumers are dependent on a well-functioning waterway network. However, after decades of delays in modernising waterway infrastructure and the increasing impact of climate change, the reliability of inland waterway services is at risk. *'This calls for proactive action to address the current shortcomings and to prepare the network for the future. With small investments effective results can be realised, so we can remain a reliable partner to our clients. Inland waterway carriers are dependent on future-proof and resilient waterways in Europe'*, EBU's President Matthieu Blanc emphasises.

Inland waterways are multi-functional public assets that deliver European public goods. As such, they offer a natural advantage and a quick win for society and public spendings - we must invest now for the future. Waterway authorities, shipowners and inland ports have joined forces to provide an overview of bottlenecks in the European waterway infrastructure. The backlog in modernisation and the shortage of investment and human resources to upgrade navigable waterways undermines Europe's agility in competitiveness and climate action. *'The inland waterways are the backbone by which we can ensure current and future industries to thrive. Their success is directly bound to the quality of our waterways and ports. Long-term dedicated financial support is indispensable, without it EU industry will be slowed'*, adds EFIP President Antoine Berbain.

We have provided a platform for industrial leaders, as well as waterborne and logistics players to voice their needs in ensuring EU businesses remain competitive, resilient and safe. High-quality waterway infrastructure has emerged as the top priority, as clean industrial growth relies on sustainable and reliable supply chains. Gert-Jan Muilerman, chairman of Inland Navigation Europe stresses: *"Seventy-five percent of all goods transported via inland waterways cross international borders, underscoring its role as a genuinely European mode of transport. The contributions from business leaders in this publication reaffirm that predictable, long-term EU investment in modernising waterway infrastructure is essential for fostering industrial resilience and promoting sustainable growth. Furthermore, such investment will enhance water resilience and improve climate preparedness for economic activities reliant on or situated along these vital waterways.'*

It is important to note that creating a well-functioning transport network goes beyond addressing megaprojects. The Connecting Europe Facility is currently the best tool to realise the TEN-T and ensure that European industries continue to have a strong logistical backbone upon which to rely for the coming century. *'However, the sector's ability to deliver to its full potential hinges on robust*

and resilient infrastructure, especially in the face of increasing challenges like low water levels and the impacts of climate change. We will need an adequate and dedicated budget line, capable of removing all bottlenecks affecting cross-border connectivity. A centrally managed budget would provide the stability and focus needed to build a resilient future for the sector and the continent.' concludes Christiaan Van Lancker, President, European IWT Platform and ESO.

The undersigning associations urge the continuation of a dedicated, robust and predictable transport budget centrally managed at the EU level:

- Sound long-term strategic budget planning is essential for the successful implementation of infrastructure projects.
- Connecting Europe requires a network approach that integrates infrastructure rather than a patchwork of isolated mega projects.
- Addressing bottlenecks within national borders is essential to ensuring seamless connections between well-functioning multimodal transport corridors across borders.
- This is particularly true for inland waterway transport which predominantly provides cross-border services. Unlike other transport modes, it lacks alternative routes, meaning that even a single bottleneck can create a negative ripple effect across the entire corridor.
- Waterway projects go beyond transport, delivering major contributions to the climate resilience of economic and societal activities both on and along waterways.
- The absence of a transboundary perspective has historically limited the effectiveness of national plans in implementing trans-European policies, which are crucial for completing the TEN-T network. Additionally, growing pressure on national administrative capacities underscores the urgent need for a coordinated, EU-level approach.
- The centrally managed Connecting Europe Facility has proven to be an effective mechanism. It can be further enhanced to provide both predictability, flexibility and administrative simplification.
- In the next EU budget, we need a funding instrument built on similar principles to ensure the completion of the TEN-T network, eliminate bottlenecks in the inland waterway network, and make it climate resilient through appropriate co-funding.

17 December 2024

