Distr.: Restricted
27 October 2016
English only

Working Party on Inland Water Transport

Sixtieth session
Geneva, 2–4 November 2016
Agenda item 5
Follow-up to the UNECE White Paper on Efficient and Sustainable Inland Water Transport in Europe: A new strategy and the Terms of Reference of SC.3.

Comments of the European Commission' Directorate General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE) on the proposal for a new strategy of the Working Party on Inland Water Transport and its Terms of Reference

Transmitted by the European Commission

I. Background

At the occasion of the Forty-ninth session of the Working Party SC.3/WP.3, DG MOVE provided some preliminary comments to the proposal. This document provides a number of further clarifications regarding recent developments in the EU transport policy in the inland navigation sector as promoted by DG MOVE.

The comments are intended as contribution to the work of the secretariat on the Inland Water Transport Strategy 2016-2021, in view of the preparation of the updated version planned for discussion at the sixtieth session of SC.3.

II. Overarching goals and objectives for 2016-2021

The overarching goals and objectives for 2016-2021 are in line with the objectives of the EU inland navigation policy as defined in the NAIADES II communication.

III. EU actions contributing to these goals

The overarching aim of the developments mentioned is to promote an advanced inland navigation sector as a key element of a sustainable transport system, improving modal share and serving the objectives of the Single Market and of social and territorial cohesion.

Building sustainable IWT infrastructure and services

One of the most relevant developments at EU level in the recent years has been the revision of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Guidelines and the adoption of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF).

The completion of the TEN-T core corridors require the identification and monitoring of the infrastructure projects required to address inland waterways bottlenecks, improvements and/or maintenance issues.

In respect of inland navigation, the TEN-T Guidelines foresee that waterways of European importance (CEMT Class IV dimensions and above) achieve "good navigation status" (GNS) by year 2030.

DG MOVE has launched a study for specifying the GNS infrastructure parameters, taking account of the diversity of waterways' features, technological progress and environmental requirements (results expected end 2017)

The TEN-T Guidelines provides also for the completion of TEN-T core corridors by year 2030. Those corridors combine all transport modes, including inland waterways. CEF funding and financing mechanisms give priority for inland waterways projects.

Establishing a pipeline of projects through the TEN-T Corridor work plans addressing shortcomings in waterways of European significance is an important step forward for the promotion of IWT services.

Capacity-building of administrations for conducting preparatory studies, cost-benefit analysis, environmental impact assessments and assessment funding and finance options is of key importance for ensuring practical progress in the improvement of infrastructure needs.

In terms of services, a renewed effort on administrative simplification and trade facilitation technical measures (e.g. paperless environment, harmonisation of administrative requirements) and elimination of administrative barriers is needed for improving the competitive position of IWT with respect to other transport modes.

Integration in multimodal transport chains: Improvement of multi-modal facilities in key nodal points of European waterways will facilitate seamless rail-road-waterborne transport services. Modernisation of cargo-handling equipment and the innovation of the interface "inland vessels – inland and sea ports" is seen also as of utmost importance for achieving seamless integration of inland navigation in the transport chain. Mechanism fostering cooperation between public sector and private operators would also facilitate the use of cost-efficient, environmentally friendly IWT services in multimodal transport chains.

Prevention of environmental pollution and resilience to climate change: EU environmental legislation including the Habitat and the Water Framework Directives guarantee a high degree of environmental performance for Inland waterways projects. The Environmental Impact Assessments requirements under EU legislation ensure that infrastructure projects preserve or even improve the environmental status of rivers and waterways, addressing also climate change risks. Deployment of river / ports reception facilities for ship waste treatment is also a key requirement for prevention of pollution.

Technical assistance, by means of mixed teams of environmental and transportation experts, could help with the planning of projects and reduce the time required for preparing infrastructure projects.

In terms of environmental emissions, convergence towards new engines' requirements will significantly reduce CO2 and NOx/SOx emissions from inland waterways vessels. Further effort will be needed to also address the emissions of existing vessels.

Ensuring a safe and secure mode of transport: Statistics on incidents and accidents in inland waterways should be improved. Conclusions and recommendations of technical investigations by independent experts should be shared to the benefits of all actors, in a perspective of prevention of risks.

Safety aspects of passenger vessels, in particular of river cruise ships in long circuits are an important priority; crew training requirements and existence of adequate technical river services (tug-boats, search and rescue, fire-prevention) along river circuits are part of those priorities.

Consolidating the social pillar: the transition to the competence-based approach for professional qualifications should be consolidated and completed with appropriate tools that ensure its efficient implementation whilst providing for a level playing field. Harmonisation of minimum requirements is also necessary for crewing requirements.

Fostering innovation and automation: innovative ships' designs, propulsion and operation technologies should be supported. The transition to digital and satellite-based enabled navigation and vessels servicing should be prepared for, the cost of energy-efficient and low pollution navigation should be brought down and information exchange should be improved.

Development of IWT related statistics: The IWT Market Observatory produced by the CCNR is an excellent effort to provide both relevant statistical information and assessment of market developments and underlying trends and circumstances.

Eurostat (EU Statistical Office) is conducting an important effort to provide relevant figures based on official information provided by EU member states. A number of pilot projects concerning IWT passenger data will be launched in 2017 following the amendment of the EU Directive on IWT statistical data which may also include accident data and a voluntary collection of port statistics is currently coordinated by Eurostat.

Developing partnerships and increasing visibility of IWT: Cooperation with the associations representing the inland navigation sector is also of crucial importance for promoting inland waterways and achieving the above-mentioned policy objectives. Moreover, support and cooperation should be also envisaged with training institutions and social partners representatives, increasing the attractiveness of the sector and promoting business opportunities and jobs.

IV. Addressing points of potential duplication

The EU Naiades II programme focus on achieving truly single market conditions for the inland navigation sector: stakeholders, including infrastructure managers, shipping companies, ports, terminal operators, shippers and professionals should be guaranteed a fair level playing field. Obstacles, including those resulting from duplication of activities and/or over regulatory burden should be avoided.

The work of UNECE at international level is of strategic importance to achieve convergence towards international standards, consolidating also a fair level playing field in support of a prosperous inland navigation sector serving UN sustainable goal objectives.

Ultimately, all countries with important inland waterways share the overarching objectives proposed in the UNECE Strategy and recognise the need for dialogue and cooperation. Achieving a robust international regulatory framework whilst avoiding duplication of work is of interest of the European Institutions and of all UNECE Members States.

V. Areas of synergies between action at EU and at UNECE level

The work of the UNECE to continue the pan-European dialogue should be continued and further developed, considering also and perhaps emphasising exchanges at the global level.

As regards data collection, synergies with pilot and voluntary initiatives by Eurostat should be explored. The use of TENtec as a repository of inland waterway infrastructure information is an significant development that should be considered when devising strategies for efficient information gathering.

Implementation of inland waterway infrastructure development strategies at UNECE level should take account of the development of the inland waterway component of the TEN-T network and its corridors, as reflected in the corridor work plans. These corridor developments and the emerging concept of good navigation status may be considered when the AGN is amended. Furthermore, it would be useful to examine the possibility of streamlining the TENtec and the blue book updating with a view to avoid duplicate information gathering. The TENtec data can be made accessible to the UNECE. The list of inland waterway bottlenecks could also benefit from coordinating with similar work carried out in the framework of the TEN-T Corridor implementation.

Directive (EU) 2016/1629 adopted on 14 September 2016 is an important milestone for the development of technical requirements for vessels in the EU. This Directive makes explicit reference to CESNI, a new body set up under the auspices of the CCNR. As regards safety and operational requirements and the greening of the fleet, the UNECE is recommended to closely follow and become associated in the work of CESNI on the technical requirements for vessels, in particular the efforts to develop objective-oriented and modular standards, with a view to examine the opportunity for the UNECE to refer to the CESNI standards (or modules of these standards) in its own resolutions. Similar approaches could be developed for professional qualifications.

The work of the UNECE on river-sea vessels is useful and should be pursued, while considering the possibility to refer to CESNI standards as a basis for such developments.

The further work on CEVNI and SIGNI is welcome.

Discussion on electronic formats for vessel documents is important and should be pursued with a high priority. For a number of such documents, this subject will be discussed in the framework of the Digitial Inland Waterway Transport Area (DINA) initiative of the Commission. The Commission is also looking at electronic documents for crew and cargo. The UNECE might also extend its discussion to these areas.

The application of the Hull database at pan-European level would require further discussion and adaptation of the legislative framework.

The public of (interactive) maps should be aligned with existing initiatives so as to avoid duplication of data gathering.