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P9_TA(2021)0367

Towards future-proof inland waterway transport in Europe**European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2021 towards future-proof inland waterway transport in Europe (2021/2015(INI))**

(2022/C 117/02)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission staff working document of 25 February 2021 entitled ‘Evaluation of Directive 2005/44/EC on Harmonised River Information Services (RIS)’ (SWD(2021)0050),
- having regard to the Commission staff working document of 24 February 2021 entitled ‘Evaluation of the 2013 Urban Mobility Package (SWD(2021)0047),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 9 December 2020 entitled “Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy — putting European transport on track for the future” (COM(2020)0789), and the accompanying staff working document (SWD(2020)0331),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 on the European Green Deal (COM(2019)0640),
- having regard to the Commission staff working document of 18 September 2018 entitled “Mid-term progress report on the implementation of the NAIADES II action programme for the promotion of inland waterway transport (covering the period 2014-2017)” (SWD(2018)0428),
- having regard to the Commission white paper of 28 March 2011 entitled “Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area — Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system” (COM(2011)0144),
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2017/2397 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2017 on the recognition of professional qualifications in inland navigation ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2016/1629 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2016 laying down technical requirements for inland waterway vessels ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to Directive 2014/94/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure ⁽³⁾, and the future revision thereof,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network ⁽⁴⁾ (TEN-T Regulation), and the future revision thereof,
- having regard to Council Directive 92/106/EEC of 7 December 1992 on the establishment of common rules for certain types of combined transport of goods between Member States ⁽⁵⁾, and the future revision thereof,
- having regard to Directive 2005/44/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on harmonised river information services (RIS) on inland waterways in the Community ⁽⁶⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 345, 27.12.2017, p. 53.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 252, 16.9.2016, p. 118.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 307, 28.10.2014, p. 1.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 348, 20.12.2013, p. 1.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 368, 17.12.1992, p. 38.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 152.

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- having regard to the Council conclusions of 21 October 2020 on policy considerations for a pandemic and other major crisis contingency plan for the European freight transport sector,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 5 June 2020 on the EU waterborne transport sector — future outlook: towards a carbon-neutral, zero accidents, automated and competitive EU waterborne transport sector,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 15 November 2018 on inland waterway transport — “See its potential and promote it!”,
 - having regard to its resolution of 27 April 2021 on technical and operational measures for more efficient and cleaner maritime transport ⁽⁷⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Green Deal ⁽⁸⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 14 February 2019 on NAIADES II — An action programme to support inland waterway transport ⁽⁹⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 22 November 2016 on unleashing the potential of waterborne passenger transport ⁽¹⁰⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Transport and Tourism (A9-0231/2021),
- A. whereas the EU’s waterborne transport sector, including inland waterway transport, is of strategic interest to the integrity of its supply and the competitiveness of its ports; whereas 75 % of inland waterway navigation takes place across borders and coordination is therefore essential for the single market;
- B. whereas European countries have a variety of large and smaller navigable waterways and different fleets of inland vessels, which makes inland waterway transport very convenient and useful for transporting different types and large quantities of cargo to different destinations over water;
- C. whereas inland waterway transport is an essential pillar in the shift towards multimodal sustainable transport, but is also facing considerable challenges; whereas inland waterways currently represent a very small share of freight transport in the EU (6,1 %), while road has a 76,3 % share and rail 17,6 %; whereas the current modal share of inland waterway transport is far too small and a sharp increase is needed to reduce road congestion, enhance safety, reduce emissions and ensure a more sustainable transport system as a whole; whereas further action is urgently needed to achieve the objective of shifting a substantial part of the 76,3 % of inland freight currently carried by road onto rail and inland waterways; whereas it is crucial, in this regard, to link new sustainable circular and energy markets to inland waterway transport;
- D. whereas the further development of the inland waterway sector is a cornerstone for building a smart, sustainable and competitive European transport network; whereas the current navigability of Europe’s waterways is patchy and the modal shift is hindered by bottlenecks, missing links and a lack of reliability of free-flowing inland waterways; whereas inland waterways, as one of the most environmentally friendly modes of transport with a largely untapped further potential for transporting substantial amounts of goods across the European Union, can play a fundamental role in meeting the EU’s climate objectives;
- E. whereas the total share of cross-border freight by our inland waterways is 54 % on the Rhine-Alpine corridor, 35 % on the North Sea-Mediterranean corridor and 38 % on the North Sea-Baltic corridor; whereas it is important to advance the completion of the TEN-T inland waterway core network and connections with the comprehensive network;
- F. whereas European waterway traffic relies on seamless and smooth cross-border connections, which makes the completion of the TEN-T core networks by 2030 a matter of utmost importance;

⁽⁷⁾ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0131.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 270, 7.7.2021, p. 2.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ C 449, 23.12.2020, p. 154.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 224, 27.6.2018, p. 29.

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- G. whereas the Commission's white paper on transport published as long ago as 2011 highlighted the fact that the modal share of inland waterways in Europe needs to be increased and whereas insufficient progress has been achieved since then;
- H. whereas there is strong consensus in the inland waterway transport sector that greening is key to ensure the sector's long-term competitiveness and enable it to play a significant, reliable and credible role in the multimodal shift; whereas a broad reflection on how to finance this green transition is ongoing in the sector; whereas the time has come for more concrete measures, tools and means to help put this ambition into practice;
- I. whereas insufficient infrastructure investments have led to a backlog; whereas qualitative infrastructure is the basis and backbone of a successful inland waterway sector; whereas increasing capacity has its limits and focus should equally be on increasing performance and ensuring reliability of the sector at all times;
- J. whereas a substantial share of EU inland waterway freight is seaport related; whereas both sea and inland ports play an important role as multimodal hubs, providing connections with other modes of transport that can also take over freight loads; whereas it is therefore important and required by the TEN-T guidelines that sea and inland ports should be well connected with one another and have good connections with the hinterland; notes that inland ports should become energy hubs for sustainable alternative fuels;
- K. whereas drought and climate change are two of the major problems facing European inland waterway transport; whereas in several European regions, inland waterway transport was hit hard by the long period of drought in 2018 owing to extremely low water levels; whereas the consequences were devastating for the Rhine and its tributaries, the Upper and Middle Danube and the Upper and Middle Elbe; whereas in Germany this led to a decline of EUR 5 billion in industrial production; whereas, moreover, inland water areas in Northern Europe tend to be frozen during the severest winter months, which disrupts traffic;
- L. whereas the modal shift from road to inland waterways not only concerns freight but also passenger transport, notably in urban areas; whereas as 50 % of the EU population lives close to the sea and along rivers, inland waterway passenger transport offers an environmentally friendly alternative in terms of both energy consumption and noise emissions; whereas it also helps to decongest overloaded road networks and provides an alternative to the expansion of road infrastructure in densely populated areas;
- M. whereas river cruises, ferries, day trip vessels, water taxis and water shuttles play an important role in European tourism and should become a cleaner option for tourism and public transport in regions and cities with accessible and navigable rivers, canals and lakes, which would also make urban mobility more sustainable and effective; whereas the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy should take this into account;
- N. whereas together with rail, inland waterway freight transport will play a crucial role in attaining the objectives of the Green Deal in terms of the modal shift in freight transport; whereas the two modes in supply chains should be mainstreamed and made more accessible;
- O. whereas inland waterway transport could play an important role for maritime transport in terms of enhancing digitalisation and creating scale regarding zero-emission propulsion solutions, such as electrification and hydrogen;
- P. whereas the procedures to obtain a certificate for a hydrogen vessel are still very lengthy; whereas for a series of hydrogen vessels with exactly the same technical characteristics, separate applications have to be submitted for every single vessel; whereas this kind of administrative burden discourages private investment and thus stymies technological progress and cost efficiency improvements;
- Q. whereas the energy transition is also a challenge for the inland navigation sector despite inland waterways being one of the most environmentally friendly modes of transport; whereas it is important to take account of the role of contractors in the entire supply chain in order to improve the business case for sustainable investments in the inland waterway transport sector;
- R. whereas the inland waterway fleet needs to be modernised and adapted to reflect technical progress in order to further improve vessels' environmental performance; whereas zero-emission technologies are not yet viable at scale in the inland waterway transport sector due to poor technical maturity, a lack of infrastructure and uncompetitive prices;

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5. whereas the inland waterway transport sector ensured the continued distribution of essential goods during the COVID-19 pandemic, with certain parts of it even experiencing peaks in traffic, thereby demonstrating its flexibility and resilience;

Modal shift in freight: from road to inland waterways

1. Calls on the Commission to take the initiative on green, efficient and digital leadership and to build on existing programmes such as NAIADES, which should support and incentivise all stakeholders within the waterway transport sector, as well as other transport modes, in particular rail, to work together towards a sustainable and social future, while supporting entrepreneurship, the protection of workers and the competitiveness of the sector as a whole; emphasises that inland waterways constitute an excellent transport mode for commodities originating from new circular economy markets and that coordinating transport, environmental and industrial policies is key to seizing these opportunities;

2. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take better account of the fact that those operating in the inland waterway sector are often families with children on board and to invest in adequate and regular facilities along waterway routes in order to provide decent living conditions en route;

3. Calls on the Commission to present proposals for a governance and regulatory framework in line with the next NAIADES action programme, ensuring harmonisation and standardisation at EU level for quality navigability, vessels and crew qualifications; points out that this framework should facilitate the coordination of investments, action programmes and the various bodies involved in inland waterway transport development, including the Member States' administrations, EU agencies, TEN-T coordinators, river commissions and standardisation committees; highlights the opportunity to map a potential modal shift in the transport of goods to inland waterways through the NAIADES III action programme; highlights that this modal shift and better coordination between industrial and transport policies would help to achieve the objectives of the Green Deal, requiring almost all industrial sectors to undergo a sustainable and circular transformation;

4. Welcomes the Commission's intention expressed in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy to shift more goods from road to inland waterways and short-sea shipping, including regional, urban and intercity freight transport; stresses, nevertheless, the considerable untapped potential and scope for expansion of inland waterway transport; calls on the Commission, therefore, to regularly evaluate and step up its ambitions for the modal shift goals of inland waterway transport and to reap the benefits of the sector; calls on the Commission, furthermore, to support the uptake of best practices on integrating inland waterway transport services into multimodal logistics chains; stresses that investments are needed in more flexible and innovative ship designs and in greening the existing inland waterway transport fleet, developing *inter alia* river-adapted ships and other mature, sustainable solutions to provide a more competitive and sustainable alternative to road transport;

5. Stresses that more and regular investment in expanding, updating and upgrading the physical and digital infrastructure of inland waterways, such as locks, bridges and the interoperable deployment of digital technologies across borders, is key to boosting the competitiveness of the sector, to preventing its decline, to improving its long-term performance, reliability and predictability across borders, to enabling quality navigability and to facilitating the modal shift, while respecting biodiversity concerns and the applicable environmental law such as the Water Framework Directive ⁽¹⁾ and the Nature Directives ⁽²⁾; calls on the Commission to facilitate the exchange of best practices across Member States, with particular regard to taking account of fauna and flora needs in infrastructure projects;

6. Urges the Member States to fully respect their obligation to complete the TEN-T core inland waterway network by 2030 and calls on the Commission and the TEN-T coordinators to strengthen oversight in this regard; calls on the Member States to eliminate the missing links, tackle bottlenecks and promote quality physical and digital infrastructure; highlights, in particular, the need to increase investments in adequate multimodal infrastructure in ports and hinterland connections of inland ports, such as seamless rail connections and terminals, and to increase their storage capacity in order to facilitate competitive multimodal transport in Europe and enhance their supply chain performance;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ The Habitats Directive (OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7) and Birds Directive (OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7).

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7. Deems it necessary to introduce a dual-layer network approach by complementing the existing core network of inland waterways with a comprehensive network of inland waterways in order to bolster inland waterway transport; points out that navigable waterways which are connected to sea ports and do not have class IV status but have the potential to reduce negative environmental externalities, including road congestion, should be considered for the comprehensive network; stresses the need, therefore, to extend the TEN-T network to incorporate new inland waterway sections into core and comprehensive networks in order to establish new multimodal transport hubs;
8. Considers it important to recognise the untapped potential of smaller waterways to enhance direct competition with road transport, by ensuring a detailed, comprehensive and intricate network that is kept up-to-date and navigable; calls on the Commission to not only consider large waterways, but to include smaller waterways in the digital transition;
9. Underlines the significant potential in refurbishing connecting waterways and canals, especially in regions that have suffered from decades of insufficient investment in inland waterway infrastructure;
10. Calls on the Member States to ensure that all the relevant stakeholders are engaged in the multidisciplinary planning process for new navigation projects and maintenance measures in order to devise commonly accepted solutions in line with EU legislation;
11. Notes that waterway transport needs a more effective, reliable, safe and climate-resilient infrastructure network to better tackle the problem of flooding and low water levels, which will only get worse due to the effects of climate change; deplores the fact that the problems affecting the inland waterway sector caused by flooding and low water levels have not been taken duly into account and that ensuring navigability is key; stresses the need, therefore, to take coherent action, such as adapting fleets, including the type of ships, quantity of fleet and spare capacity, optimising ship design, taking account of the versatility of inland waterway vessels, ensuring the better management and development of infrastructure, providing more accurate information about water levels and forecasting, cooperating with rail during low water periods, drawing up time charter contracts for vessels which are able to operate during low water tide periods, implementing digital tools, and increasing storage capacity in ports; calls on the Commission and the Member States to draw up action plans to combat low water levels and stresses the need for coordination to this end;
12. Stresses the importance of using space data and services for inland waterway transport services to ensure a safer, more sustainable, efficient and competitive sector; considers, in particular, that new services in the Galileo and Copernicus programmes and the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) should be included in the review of the ITS Directive⁽¹³⁾ and other smart mobility legislative initiatives;

Greening inland waterway transport

13. Highlights the importance of tackling the energy transition in a cost-efficient and accessible way, while recognising the diverse range in types of vessels, by quickly stepping up the availability and rollout of a heterogeneous mix of clean alternative fuels, alternative fuel infrastructure and propulsion methods for shipping with a network approach and in accordance with the principle of technological neutrality; recognises, furthermore, the use of all readily deployable options to reduce inland navigation emissions, including bridging fuels and transitional systems; emphasises, once again, that an energy transition in inland navigation is key to attaining the climate-neutral agenda by 2050;
14. Points out that there is a lack of market-ready climate-neutral solutions and that authorities should therefore be entitled to capacity-building funding in order to help the sector get access to funding and support it in its pathway towards climate neutrality; highlights the importance of further incentivising research and development projects for fuel and technologies that considerably reduce the impact on climate and the environment in order to rapidly upscale fleets and build up supply chains and economies of scale; recognises the potential for the inland waterway sector to act as a testbed and catalyst for positive spillover effects in the maritime shipping sector; calls on the Commission, therefore, to develop a realistic roadmap to further reduce pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions in order to achieve a decarbonised inland waterway sector, while safeguarding competitiveness, reliability and safety;

⁽¹³⁾ Directive 2010/40/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the framework for the deployment of Intelligent Transport Systems in the field of road transport and for interfaces with other modes of transport (OJ L 207, 6.8.2010, p. 1).

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15. Underlines the particular role that inland waterways should play in the EU Hydrogen Strategy, both in terms of the clean fuelling of inland waterway transport and the crucial importance of inland waterways and ports for the clean and efficient distribution of hydrogen along the EU's transport networks and industry clusters;

16. Highlights that alternatives that considerably reduce the impact on climate and the environment should become widely available, more affordable and financially attractive vis-à-vis conventional propulsions; stresses the need to accelerate the uptake of these alternatives by, for example, ensuring a realistic blending percentage based on an impact assessment that covers a life cycle analysis of fuels and in line with the EU's sustainability criteria, as well as through regulatory stability and financial support, including the granting of tax incentives by the Member States; considers, furthermore, that Member States should have the opportunity to set a decreasing or zero tax rate for the use of shore-side electricity and other sustainable solutions; calls on the Commission, furthermore, to support and substantially incentivise the use of the relevant financial instruments for the take-up of sustainable alternative fuels and technologies;

17. Calls on the Commission to assess the possibility of devising an EU emissions labelling scheme for inland waterway transport that provides readily available information on the energy performance of ships, promotes energy efficiency, and creates a stable environment for investment decisions, which should lead to a viable business case and return on investment for shippers; highlights that this scheme must aim to effectively reduce emissions and assist the sector by providing improved access to funding, loans and guarantees based on its emissions performance, improve emissions monitoring, create benefits by incentivising port authorities to differentiate port infrastructure charges and ultimately make the sector more attractive as a whole; calls on the Commission to provide a practical guide and toolbox on the sustainable fuel and technological possibilities for inland waterway and short-sea shipping in order to support ship-owners in their decision-making; highlights that it should focus on inland waterway and short-sea shipping vessels, given their similar technical characteristics;

18. Points out that modular construction of ships provides flexibility, predictability and cost savings; stresses, in this regard, that standardised ship components, design and development create a good basis that can be used in different ways (cross-modality), and furthermore facilitate the retrofitting of more sustainable propulsion systems as soon as they enter the market; highlights that in addition to environmental benefits, modular construction can lead to cost savings and help reduce risks thanks to the predictable production and construction process and should therefore be incentivised and promoted;

19. Believes that in view of our climate goals, the shipping sector is able to offer more sustainable and future-proof transport; stresses that the Commission and national authorities should play a connecting and coordinating role in this development phase and engage with all interested stakeholders, including users of inland waterways and the shipbuilding industry; encourages the Member States to deploy pilot projects with innovative solutions such as exchangeable battery containers; stresses, in this context, the pressing need for support for innovation, an EU financing plan, the facilitation of certification and permissions to sail on alternative fuels;

20. Highlights, in this regard, the importance to the energy transition of ports and their specialised shipyards, which is where the building, conversion and retrofitting of ships takes place; calls on the Commission and the Member States, therefore, to allocate appropriate funding and investment to ensuring sufficient capacity and adequate infrastructure in ports in order to facilitate fleet renewal and the energy transition of the shipping sector; stresses, furthermore, that the development of alternative energy sources for vessels requires a suitable on-shore power supply and refuelling infrastructure;

21. Highlights that fleet greening should not only focus on tackling greenhouse gas emissions, but also aim to reduce the pollution of rivers; highlights the importance, therefore, of providing waste discharge facilities in ports and promoting the use of innovative anti-fouling paint and advanced hull maintenance technology such as underwater drones; calls on the Commission to propose a governance framework to monitor the pollution of river basins, facilitating the coordination of EU and national measures, investments and action programmes;

22. Stresses the importance of ensuring sound and cross-cutting management of water resources, which involves administering hydraulic systems, fostering the development of hydroelectricity, guaranteeing the different uses of water and preserving biodiversity; stresses, therefore, that water management should involve transport, energy, agricultural, industrial and environmental stakeholders;

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Digitalisation and autonomous shipping

23. Notes that far-reaching digitalisation and data collection can contribute to a cleaner environment and improved safety on board and bring about more efficient routing, less congestion in ports and better communication and information exchange between ships, ports and infrastructure; points out that digitalisation could bring significant benefits in terms of safety and energy efficiency for the collection and analysis of data on the inland waterway transport sector, contributing to further emissions reduction; calls for a strategy to develop and deploy digital and automated technologies in the inland waterway sector, which should outline both interoperable standards across modes and borders and the requisite research actions and funding, including via dedicated calls within Horizon Europe; stresses the need, in this regard, to update technical standards at the European Committee for Drawing up Standards in the Field of Inland Navigation (CESNI) and to further harmonise river information services (RIS), which would simplify procedures in regulating inland navigation, reduce the problems arising from different interpretations of technical standards and the lack of comparable data, and allow for the speedy development and deployment of innovative solutions; underlines the need to prepare for a common framework for interoperable data exchange between transport modes;

24. Calls on the Commission to ensure a harmonised digital use and acceptance of electronic crew and vessel documents throughout the EU as soon as possible, which will strengthen the monitoring of social and employment conditions, improve the efficiency and attractiveness of inland waterway transport and its smooth interaction and integration with other transport modes, and boost the interoperability of data exchange systems throughout the entire logistics chain; emphasises that the lack of proper rest for workers on board can pose considerable safety risks; highlights, therefore, that reliable, real-time digital controlling capacity to read, store and generate data on the working and resting times of workers on board is crucial;

25. Stresses the need for the swift implementation of the Electronic Freight Transport Information (eFTI) Regulation⁽¹⁴⁾ in order to allow transport operators to share information with enforcement authorities swiftly, easily and in a digital format;

26. Notes that data integration and harmonisation are a key asset management tool to strengthen the reliability of inland waterway transport and increase its use in logistics chains; notes that the data needs to be interconnected with smart infrastructure to enable efficient planning and communication with other modes of transport to facilitate multimodality and synchronodal systems; notes the potential of integrated data platforms to enhance transparency gains, such as in tracking and control, and efficiency gains, such as in route planning and asset management;

27. Stresses the importance of collecting data on the European logistics system in coordination with the relevant stakeholders in preparation for the proposal for a revised Combined Transport Directive⁽¹⁵⁾ and other measures ensuring more efficient logistics planning and use of physical infrastructure; calls on the Commission, moreover, to come up with an intermodal overview of the flow of goods and containers that enter Europe and the routes taken by the goods to their end destination, which could be beneficial for drawing up an effective modal shift policy; considers that boosting the modal shift should be considered a priority as sea containers are not always transported efficiently from seaports to the hinterland at present, leading to higher costs and longer travel times; calls on the Commission to assess the added value of algorithms and artificial intelligence in the hinterland transport of containers to optimise planning and processing to this end;

28. Stresses the importance of connecting existing digital transport policy frameworks and making sure that multimodal transport data is available through a single point of access in order to achieve efficiency gains in waterborne freight transport and ensure interoperability of data with other modes of transport; calls on the Commission, in this regard, to come up with an EU action plan for the digital infrastructure of multimodal transport that enables data sharing and interoperability, with the goal of achieving a synchronodal, connected and automated transport system by 2035 at the latest; considers that a dedicated governance structure is needed for continuous and regular monitoring, evaluation and improvements in order to use the most up-to-date technologies and innovation;

29. Points to the need for incentives for the development of multimodal digital port platforms; calls, in this regard, for the creation of a project of European added value for the navigability and multimodal connection of TEN-T inland waterway corridors;

⁽¹⁴⁾ OJ L 249, 31.7.2020, p. 33.

⁽¹⁵⁾ OJ L 368, 17.12.1992, p. 38.

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30. Stresses the great potential of inland waterway transport for autonomous waterborne travel and highlights that more automation brings the reality of synchromodal transport in Europe closer; calls on the Commission, on the basis of an impact assessment and broad consultation with all the relevant stakeholders, to consider revising all of the relevant legislation where necessary in order to facilitate the uptake of autonomous shipping, with particular regard to the responsibilities of crew in emergencies or system failure, clarification of liability issues in cases of damage and, more generally, the safety aspects of autonomous vessels, in order to achieve a certain level of harmonisation and increase the uptake of the technology at EU level; insists, therefore, on the creation of a European roadmap for smart and autonomous inland waterway transport systems, which should support future-oriented legislation, research, pilot projects, field labs, and the development and successful deployment of autonomous ships, smart ports and digital interoperability based on intelligent transport systems, as well as ensure the deployment of remote vessel control and the remote management of locks; stresses the need, in this regard, for smart infrastructure and the necessary training, upskilling and reskilling of crew, which could be supported under the social investments and skills window of the InvestEU programme; highlights, in this connection, the valuable contribution of CESNI standards for crew, vessels and information technology; calls on the Commission to prioritise the digitalisation, harmonisation and quick wins (paperless exchange) of inland waterway transport, laying the foundations for an autonomous sector;

31. Highlights that safe and secure autonomous navigation requires standardised sharing of information that goes beyond vessels' antenna positions, such as vessel attitude, the contour of the hull and modifications to waterways in order to manage autonomous operations, prevent potential collisions between vessels that share the same fairway, and provide skippers with the latest fairway information; highlights the potential of space solutions as enablers for inland waterway transport and the useful contribution of the EU space assets Galileo, EGNOS and Copernicus in this regard;

Future-proof ports: energy and circular hubs

32. Stresses the role of inland ports as strategic, multimodal nodes in the logistics system; stresses, therefore, that inland ports as well as sea ports should have efficient hinterland connections, in particular with rail infrastructure, and should include trans-shipment facilities, with a focus on connecting to the TEN-T core and comprehensive networks where possible; supports greater cooperation and clustering between sea and inland ports;

33. Stresses the importance of sea ports in enabling a modal shift towards inland waterway transport; notes that improving the bundling of inland waterway freight will facilitate more efficient inland waterway transport to and from sea ports; highlights that close cooperation between the various sea and inland ports and all stakeholders in the logistics chain, such as in the area of sustainability, creates further possibilities for improvement in terms of cost and operational efficiency and benefits regional development and employment;

34. Calls on the Commission to ensure that inland ports maintain existing rail connections and that Member States prioritise upgrading their rail freight network in order to ensure intermodal transport flows between inland waterways and rail;

35. Highlights that the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure should take into account the potential demand and market characteristics of ports when drawing up potential pathways towards a climate-neutral inland waterway sector; stresses, therefore, that a European rollout strategy of alternative fuels for multimodal and industrial use through the TEN-T revision and Directive 2014/94/EU on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure should follow a network approach that delivers efficiently planned infrastructure, based on the potential market demand characteristics of a port and its hinterland and, where necessary, along water routes, in accordance with the principle of technology neutrality; stresses, moreover, the potential of a flexible infrastructure system such as harnessing mobile power generators and calls on the Commission to assess flexible fuel distribution and supply solutions, for example renting schemes for vessels;

36. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen the synergies between inland waterways infrastructure and the Trans-European Networks for Energy, which will facilitate the energy transition of inland shipping and support the development of ports as energy hubs; highlights, in this regard, the need to better integrate inland waterways infrastructure into the European energy grid in order to facilitate the use of on-shore power supply; stresses, in addition, the potential of inland waterways for the transport of alternative fuels; stresses the necessity of building electrical infrastructure across European inland ports in order to accommodate vessels with electric power sources in the future and scale up and upgrade the facilities and equipment provided at berth and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution in ports and their surrounding areas, in line with the objective of zero pollution at berth;

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37. Stresses the importance of tackling the issue of fluidity in ports by ensuring enough berth and waiting area capacity for inland vessels;

38. Stresses the potential of inland waterways for transporting dangerous goods and waste, which requires investments in adequate and safe infrastructure and vessels and a skilled workforce; highlights the promising role of ports in the circular economy and the special potential of inland waterways to transport commodities originating from new circular markets; calls on the Commission, therefore, to establish a stronger link between its circular economy and inland waterway transport policies; calls on the Commission, moreover, to develop measures to support circular economy activities in ports and to promote the concept of a life cycle assessment with the aim of initiating a dialogue and encouraging inland ports to design integrated management systems for *inter alia* water, energy, waste, construction sites, spatial planning and urban green areas in order to unlock their potential to become circular and clean energy hubs;

Education and training, working conditions, and research and innovation

39. Stresses the need to modernise inland navigation education and training, focusing on the development of green and digital skills and overcoming language barriers, thereby creating attractive jobs for young people and women, paying due attention to high and harmonised social and safety standards and qualification levels; supports, in this regard, the further development of CESNI standards to ensure the necessary skills for the crew members of inland navigation vessels; emphasises the need for compulsory, continuous and regular training schemes for all crew members, including international exchange courses, in order to promote upskilling, reskilling, optimal labour mobility and safety throughout the sector; stresses the need for health and safety standards in line with the zero-accidents principle; calls on the Member States, furthermore, to properly implement Directive (EU) 2017/2397 on the recognition of professional qualifications in inland navigation by 17 January 2022;

40. Underlines the importance of guaranteeing good working conditions and decent salaries in inland waterway transport; calls on the Member States to ensure adequate social security coverage for all workers on board in line with EU social legislation; highlights the need for unambiguous labour and social security law in the inland waterway transport sector; stresses the need to safeguard social protection and rights for European and third-country crew members;

41. Points out the importance of further cooperation and synergies between the different research and innovation initiatives and institutes, by sharing knowledge, data, know-how and best practices and by making available on a public platform an overview of ongoing projects;

42. Stresses the need to encourage the project development of innovative inland waterway vessels and the corresponding port infrastructure under the Horizon Europe partnership on zero-emission waterborne transport;

An EU financing plan

I. Financing possibilities through existing EU funding instruments

43. Highlights the possibility of existing EU funding instruments for greening and digitalising the European inland waterway transport sector, such as the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), Horizon Europe, the European Structural and Investment Funds, including the Cohesion Fund, and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF); stresses the need to mobilise these instruments to complete the TEN-T core and comprehensive networks, to finance investments in the development and rollout of sustainable alternative fuels and alternative propulsion systems for vessels and the necessary infrastructure, to enable smart synergies between transport, energy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and digitalisation, and to ensure the modernisation and resilience of inland waterways; stresses, however, that these funding instruments are not always suitable for SMEs, family businesses and other microenterprises, as smaller projects risk not being eligible for funding; highlights the need, moreover, to provide clarity on sustainable financing and private investments in inland waterway transport;

44. Recalls that the energy transition to climate neutrality is a technological and financial challenge for the inland navigation sector, which requires the appropriate support; believes, in this regard, that Member States must seize the RRF as a unique funding opportunity for inland waterways, combining short-term economic recovery effects with the long-term benefits of targeted infrastructure and shipping investments;

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45. Calls on the Commission to reinforce its internal resources for inland waterway transport and the implementation of the NAIADES action programme, including human resources, bringing them into line with the ambitions for the sector under the Green Deal, the modal shift and the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy;

46. Underscores, furthermore, that investments in inland waterway transport infrastructure in and around seaports are of paramount importance; highlights the need for close cooperation between all stakeholders in the logistics value chain;

II. *The need for an EU inland waterway fund*

47. Highlights that the path towards a climate-neutral inland waterway sector and the desired energy transition will create a funding gap approaching EUR 10 billion⁽¹⁶⁾, which cannot be financed by the sector alone; highlights, moreover, the lack of a business case for private vessel owners to invest in propulsion technologies that considerably reduce the impact on climate and the environment; stresses the need to mobilise public support and private investments to this end;

48. Stresses that the inland waterway sector consists mostly of SMEs, family businesses and smaller ports, which makes it difficult for them to make expensive investments in order to comply with the goals of the Green Deal; considers, therefore, that the scalability of the requisite investments should be improved, administrative burdens significantly reduced, and access to funding enhanced;

49. Calls on the Commission, therefore, to set up a dedicated EU inland waterway fund for the sustainable transition, including a one-stop-shop system that is easily accessible for help and assistance and has the possibility to combine projects into a single application, thus increasing the chances for funding; stresses that the fund should complement the existing reserve funds created under Regulation (EU) No 546/2014⁽¹⁷⁾, with significant additional financial contributions from EU and national financing instruments as well as from other private and public investments, in order to leverage further investments from the industry and to address the current investment gap in financing the sustainable transition; emphasises that this fund should also provide for the possibility of blending with the CEF, the European Structural and Investment Funds, including the Cohesion Fund, and financing instruments from the European Investment Bank;

50. Stresses that this dedicated fund should focus on ship retrofitting and renewal in order to improve the energy efficiency of ships and support investments in innovative and energy-saving technologies as well as port infrastructure, notably the deployment of alternative fuels, thereby helping to achieve the objectives of the Green Deal, a sustainable recovery and a more sustainable transport system as a whole;

51. Calls on the Commission to assess the viability of including a new European scrapping scheme and fleet renewal as part of the fund, taking due account of the life cycle emissions of the vessels concerned, in order to facilitate a rapid shift to climate neutrality; stresses the need to address the conditions in which scrapping takes place and emphasises that circularity is key;

III. *Financing from the European Investment Bank*

52. Recalls that the European Investment Bank (EIB) provides funding for attractive capital loans, including the shipbuilding industry; considers, however, that the realisation and effectiveness of EIB funding depends on its accessibility and therefore insists on:

- i) ensuring that the EIB's Green Shipping Guarantee Programme should also apply to smaller transactions, including more flexible loan conditions by, for example, taking into account the average service life of a ship's operations during the payback period;
- ii) ensuring that the EIB provides both pre-delivery and post-delivery financing for shipbuilders in order to guarantee the implementation and viability of innovative shipbuilding projects;

⁽¹⁶⁾ Development Centre for Ship Technology and Transport Systems (DST), *Assessment of technologies in view of zero-emission IWT*, part of the overarching study by the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine entitled *Financing the energy transition towards a zero-emission European IWT sector*, Report No 2293, p. 95.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Regulation (EU) No 546/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 718/1999 on a Community-fleet capacity policy to promote inland waterway transport (OJ L 163, 29.5.2014, p. 15).

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iii) making the funding of research and innovation programmes for green shipbuilding a priority;

53. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to carefully monitor investments from non-EU countries in European ports, given their role in Europe's strategic infrastructure as multimodal hubs, key energy nodes and clusters of industry;

Passenger transport, urban mobility, waterborne city logistics and tourism

54. Welcomes the recent Commission evaluation of the 2013 Urban Mobility Package ⁽¹⁸⁾; highlights, in this regard, that the expected results of the Urban Mobility Package, namely a reduction in CO₂ and air pollutant emissions, less congestion and fewer road casualties in urban areas, have not consistently materialised across the EU; calls on the Commission, therefore, to encourage Member States and cities to include, where possible, waterborne public transport, city logistics and local freight distribution as a safe, sustainable and effective mode of transport in their sustainable urban mobility planning and to enhance their urban mobility data collection; stresses the need, furthermore, to include waterborne public transport means in digital mobility platforms such as mobility as a service, as well as in freight delivery apps;

55. Highlights the untapped potential of inland waterways in urban areas, as illustrated in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy; stresses that urban areas are becoming more and more congested and that building new road infrastructure is not always cost efficient; calls on the Commission to include waterborne transport in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy goal of making better use of inland waterways in cities and to come up with concrete proposals that aim to boost logistics over our inland waterways and take into account end delivery via cargo bikes, boosting the modal shift; calls on the Commission, in this regard, to enhance its collection of urban mobility data for waterborne passenger transport and freight and highlights the potential of inland waterway transport for the last mile in urban sustainable logistics;

56. Highlights the fact that the 2019 figures for passenger transport demand revealed that the European river cruise sector, including day trip vessels and ferry services, was in a healthy state before the COVID-19 pandemic; notes, however, that the sector came to an almost complete standstill in the first half of 2020 due to the ongoing sanitary situation, which has had a negative economic impact and caused financial difficulties for companies, and that it remains uncertain whether passenger traffic will return to normal in 2021 ⁽¹⁹⁾; calls on the Commission, therefore, to include inland waterway tourism in its upcoming European Agenda for Tourism 2050 in order to promote a business case for a sustainable, innovative and resilient recovery of river tourism, taking into account the economic benefits of river tourism in port regions in terms of added value, employment creation and port revenues;

57. Stresses the need to further explore the potential of inland waterways for recreational navigation and other waterfront activities, which would boost growth, create new job opportunities and enhance tourism in the regions concerned;

58. Calls on the Member States to endorse the International Certificate for Operators of Pleasure Craft by adopting resolution No 40 of the UN Economic Commission for Europe Inland Transport Committee in order to allow the cross-border recognition of licences and facilitate recreational navigation in Europe;

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59. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Commission staff working document of 24 February 2021 (SWD(2021)0047).

⁽¹⁹⁾ Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, *Market observation report 2020: inland navigation in Europe*, September 2020.