

Statement Manfred Seitz
Director General of the Secretariat of the Danube Commission
Virtual Ministerial Conference German EU Presidency
“Inland Waterway Transport – Key to the Green Deal”

20. November 2020

Dear Minister, Excellences, I would like to thank you for organizing this conference and for the opportunity to comment briefly.

Dear Sir or Madam,

The objectives of the European Green Deal in the area of freight mobility can only be achieved in the Danube region with efficient Danube navigation. To this end, the hydro-technical projects for improving the fairway conditions and the development of the Danube ports must be advanced. There are already a number of successful projects in Austria and Serbia, for example, to show that this is feasible in harmony with the requirements of environmental protection. However, scarce human resources in public administrations often hinder the planning and implementation of these projects. A stronger political prioritization towards a comprehensive promotion of the development of the Danube waterway is indispensable. National action plans should therefore complement the future action program for inland navigation in the European Union, NAIADES 3.

Much has been achieved in recent years, particularly with the help of funded EU projects, but work needs to be intensified in order to effectively counter the continuing negative effects of climate change on shipping and riverine ecosystems.

It would now also be important to use the funds of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) for the modernization of the Danube navigation fleet and the conversion towards zero emissions while at the same time creating the necessary framework conditions for the economic use of green ships.

Covid-19 poses additional challenges for the Danube navigation as well as for many other industries. As we have unfortunately just seen, national or regional measures adopted to protect against COVID-19 infection can significantly impede navigation. Ports in Bavaria, for example, were no longer accessible from the Danube region.

It is therefore necessary that all states implement without restrictions the communication on "Green Lanes" presented by the European Commission on 28 October, thereby exempting those employed in inland navigation from travel restrictions and quarantine measures. This will also make it possible to change ship crews. We do not consider restrictions on the maximum length of stay in a member state or in a risk area - regardless of the extent - to be a solution due to the long travel and service times in inland navigation.

In this context, I would like to take the liberty of pointing out that the working conditions in inland navigation with closed ship crews, lower personnel requirements and minimal landside contact in ports are the best possible prerequisites for the safe transport of large quantities of goods under the current conditions of the pandemic for all persons involved.

A reliable and smart infrastructure together with new, efficient ships can offer cost-effective logistics solutions for many branches of industry in the Danube region and thus make a significant contribution to the achievement of strategic environmental and economic goals.

Thank you very much for your attention.