

Dear Mr Marinescu,

Dear Ms Rautavirta,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a great pleasure to share the dock with all of you today! My heartfelt thanks go to the Port of Brussels for hosting this event, and to the operators and companies that made their vessels available for display and visits. This is a fascinating experience.
- We can all clearly see here today how innovation and modernisation is present in IWT and I am delighted to see vessel operators from around Europe, displaying how far technology is developing in inland navigation.
- With these new solutions, we can modernise the sector and focus on greening the sector further as it is very much in our interest that inland navigation becomes even more sustainable, competitive and resilient.
- Let me remind you here some facts that you are all well familiar with. The European Union's inland waterways provide 22 Member States with a congestion-free network of about 37,000 kilometres. Transporting 145 billion tonne kilometres per year, it crosses Europe from the North Sea to the Black Sea, providing hinterland connections from the Atlantic, the Baltic and the Mediterranean. Every year, over 14,000 vessels transport around 500 million tonnes of cargo by inland waterways, easing congestion in densely populated areas of Germany, the Netherlands, France and Belgium.
- Whilst the modal share of inland navigation is around 6%, what makes a difference is the quality of its contribution to the EU transport. This is why we should work closely together to increase that share and support this sustainable mode of transport in its transition.
- Let me also underline that sustainability is not a new priority in itself, but now the urgency to deliver has increased to a point of no return. We have a collective goal for the EU to become climate neutral by 2050, and the oncoming Commission has made the roll-out of a new 'Green Deal' its key priority.

- In fact, within the first 100 days of the mandate this Commission is set to present a European Green Deal that will take a deep look at everything - from how we use and produce energy to unlocking investment for new clean technologies, including how people and goods are moved around within EU.
- Naturally, transport and mobility will be an integral part of that framework and we all have an interest for that to be so!
- I have already had first exchanges to discuss how transport can most effectively contribute to that goal and I am sensing particular interest in the contribution the waterborne transport - but especially the inland and port sectors - have to offer.
- Although it is still very early stages, my invite to you today is to keep building on your green profile and be ready to look for allies outside the sector. On my side, I am deeply convinced that inland waterways can give a helping hand in meeting wider sustainability goals, and consequently take on a greater share in the transport mix.
- For that we need multimodal solutions and better utilise the perspectives that digitalisation could bring to the transport, mobility and logistics sector.
- Inland navigation is one of the most CO₂ efficient modes per transported tonnes, however reducing further the environmental impact of current vessels and in particular, the emissions from shipping engines must be a priority.
- As you know, the new Regulation on emissions from so-called ‘Non-Road Mobile Machinery’ sets the emission limits for new engines as of 2020. I know this is a challenge for operators, but as we can see here today, it is clearly possible to come up with modern, state-of-the-art technologies that support that process and places inland waterways on top of the best green performers!
- To make the transition to lower emission shipping, we will need to make the best use of all available technologies, depending on their relative maturity and market availability. From the efficiency improvements, to fully electric and hybrid propulsion, wind assistance, smart shipping

technologies, zero-carbon fuels, fuel cell technology etc. – all these solutions have a part to play!

- Therefore, it is evident that greening involves more than one single measure and the Commission has always supported a basket of different measures, including financial support, which we have provided for IWT and will continue to do so while the sector is delivering its share.
- Between 2014 and 2018, the Commission invested more than €1.6 billion in 55 actions covering fuel and infrastructure for inland navigation. The finance came mainly from the Connecting Europe Facility as well as from Horizon 2020. The LIFE programme has also financed the installation of after-treatment systems.
- Looking ahead, I would like to see IWT making even better use of our financing solutions. We are all keen to see the launch of the first calls from the Innovation Fund, which would be essential tool in helping the EU deliver on its commitments under the Paris Agreement, and supporting the European Commission's strategic vision of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050.
- We should also ensure a better link between the research funded by Horizon Europe and the deployment of new technologies.
- To sum up: make sure you are well informed and proactively involved in relation to all possibilities to modernisation and delivering more on sustainability. The Commission is here to support you and to share information about this.
- We are also well aware of the specificities of your sector and understand the need for an approach that accommodates inland waterways transport's limited market share and the risks incurred by the operators – often SMEs.
- In addition there is no doubt that, the sector would be significantly benefiting from the digitalisation and smart mobility solutions. It contributes effectively to the multimodality and sustainability, but its potential goes even further.

- Digitalisation – including automation – can take place at different levels – at vessel level, but also at infrastructure level, in business operations, and in integration within a multimodal transport system.
- It improves the flow and exchange of data while reducing administrative burden. This allows for optimised traffic flows and much better integration of all transport types. In order to achieve this, data should be made available and should be used for optimisation and increasing of efficiency.
- Of course, digitalisation also poses challenges. The sharing of information increases the risk of data breaches and cybersecurity risks. Digitalisation also calls for a change in the nature of jobs and professions in the sector, which in turn has implications for training and certifications.
- Time does not allow me to expand on this in detail, but it suffices to say that we are not naïve about digitalisation; we see it as an enormous opportunity, but we are also aware of the challenges, including the social and societal challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Inland waterways is set to become the greenest, safest, most intelligent and most efficient transport mode, boasting best-in-class connections to rail, road, and deep and short-sea systems. The opportunities are there, it is for us to embrace them and roll them out.
- On my side, I will do everything possible to have inland navigation firmly part of a European Green Deal that is fit for current times. I want the sector to enjoy the visibility it deserves and that it reaps full benefit from new greening opportunities.
- Nevertheless, whilst I have many reasons to be optimistic, I still need you to help me to help you.
- We are already obtaining good results under the NAIADES II Action Programme, and building on both the European Parliament's Resolution and the Council Conclusions on IWT under the Austrian Presidency. We have also started to reflect on how continue with that support.

- The years to come will require solid teamwork. From your side, but also from the institutional side. I look here to other distinguished speakers Mr Marinescu and Ms Rautavirta to help me build a common agenda with EP and the Council.
- Only by combining all our efforts, we would be able to succeed in taking the sector forward.
- Thank you for your kind attention!
