

**Speech by Mr Jean-Marie WOEHLING**  
**Secretary General of the CCNR**  
**on the occasion of the visit of a delegation of the**  
**Transport Committee of the European Parliament**  
**to the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine**

Mr Chairman of the Transport Committee,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome at the Palais du Rhin.

This building is the seat of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine since 1920. But the history of our organisation is much older. Before 1920, its seat was in Mannheim, the city which gave its name to the Mannheim Convention of 1868, which is still the basic text of the international legal system for the navigation of the Rhine. Still earlier, after its creation by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, its seat was in Mayence. The Central Commission is thus the oldest international organisation in Europe.

The primary role of the Central Commission is to organise and promote Rhine navigation. For this purpose, it groups together the riparian States of the Rhine and Belgium. The representatives of these five States meet regularly in order to adopt jointly regulations governing Rhine navigation, to monitor the development of the market, to interact with the profession and, if necessary, to take economic measures, to examine complaints which can result from the application of the Rhine regulations and to work at the integration of the Rhine in the broader frame of European transport policy.

Actually, while the CCNR addresses all issues regarding the Rhine as a waterway, its significance has been evident for a long time well beyond this purely regional framework. In fact, it plays a pilote role in shaping European navigation as a whole. Moreover, the Rhine accounts for approximately 70 per cent of European inland navigation in terms of volume carried.

Since the creation of the ECSC and the EEC, there have been therefore frequent contacts between the Rhine Commission and the European institutions. These exchanges have been very positive, even though their coordination has not always been easy.

When one looks at the fundamental principles of the Central Commission, one is struck by their similarities with the aims of the European Union. In fact, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the CCNR has been championing the following principles:

- freedom of navigation, which in practice means free movement of ships, persons and goods,
- equal treatment, which means the absence of discrimination based on nationality,
- unity of the Rhine system, which implies the harmonisation of the rules applicable to navigation and the creation of a “unified market” of Rhine navigation,
- commitment to social issues based on specific regulations on working conditions and social security of boatmen,
- working out of a “common policy” thanks to the existence of a permanent “Council”, the plenary assembly of the CCNR, which is competent to take all measures in favour of the prosperity of Rhine navigation.

It can be said that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Mannheim Convention has established, without saying so, a kind of Rhine Community, that is to say, a forerunner of the European Community.

The aims of the CCNR are today still the same as those of the European Union. The CCNR wishes that its achievements at the Rhine level – the unity and development of Rhine navigation – are extended to the European level, by creating a large unified market of European inland navigation, based on the principles of free competition, equal treatment, harmonisation of rules and on an active policy of promoting this mode of transport, which is the most environmentally friendly and offers the highest marginal yield in terms of public investment.

This common European space for inland waterway transport is now largely achieved, as that the European Union has extended the so-called “acquis rhénan” to the entire European inland waterways network. Indeed, most of the Rhine regulations have been extended to the whole European Union and sometimes beyond the EU.

For the implementation of its program, for the promotion of inland navigation NAIADES, the European Commission can rely on the CCNR and its technical, economic and legal expertise. To this end, an administrative arrangement on cooperation was concluded between the CCNR and the European Commission; co-financing contracts were put in place in the fields of market observation and technical prescriptions; a joint working group was set up. We are currently in discussions with the European Commission to strengthen this cooperation and to find a more stable legal and financial basis. To this end, a European regulation or an international convention are envisaged.

To put it a nutshell, the Rhine Commission plays today the role of an international administration specialised in monitoring European inland navigation issues. To this end, it cooperates with all European states with a significant inland waterway sector, to which it has granted observer status. It works also closely with the Danube Commission and the UNECE. The CCNR has moreover initiated several pan-European conventions in the field of inland navigation: the CMNI convention on the contract for the carriage of goods, the CLNI convention on the limitation of liability, the ADN convention on the transport of dangerous goods by inland waterways.

The CCNR is also in permanent contact with the relevant industry and professional associations. It is recognized as one of the most important forum for European inland navigation.

Of course, we have no claim to hold a monopoly in monitoring this sector. Nor do we want to impinge on the competences of the European Union. However, we believe that it would be reasonable for the European Union to rely on our expertise rather than to create competing structures, for instance in the form of a European agency, as envisaged some years ago.

Our proposal is to find the best synergy between the different institutions acting in the field of inland navigation, which is a relatively weak mode of transport and concerns only a limited number of member states of the European Union.

This transport mode is not the solution to every transport problem in Europe. But it is the only one that is not overcrowded. In areas where they exist, inland waterways could carry without additional investments a significantly greater volume of goods, with a very favourable energy and environmental balance. For instance, the capacity of the Rhine is far to be exhausted.

Why then, may one ask, is this mode of transport not put to greater use?

Inland waterway transport is a relatively complex mode of transport which involves the alignment of a several factors: reliable waterway, suitable vessels, modern port infrastructures, connections with other transport modes and integration into logistics chains, satisfactory price levels, incentive regulatory framework, adequate information for logistics sector, etc. There are therefore no miracle solutions for increasing the use of inland waterway transport, which, however, represents a real opportunity for the European transport System.

To increase the modal share of inland navigation in this transport system is the goal we are working for. A close partnership between the European Union and the specialised structure for inland navigation provided by the CCNR is a good mean for that. We wish to deepen this partnership. When we say partnership, we also mean mutual recognition. We are confident that in the ongoing discussions we will find a constructive approach in this spirit.

A direct link between the CCNR and the European Parliament, as concretised by your visit today, can promote this cooperation and increase the attention paid to the core problems of inland navigation.

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