

Address by Mr Jean-Marie Woehrling
Secretary General of the CCNR

at the preparatory workshop for the Side Event
as part of the World Water Forum in Marseille
(13 March 2012)

On behalf of the CCNR, I am honoured and grateful to welcome all participants to this preparatory workshop for the side event that is to take place in a few hours' time in the frame of the World Water Forum.

Most of you already know the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine. The CCNR can claim to be the oldest international organisation created for the management of a major waterway. Our organisation was brought into being by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and has been a major player in the development of inland navigation in Europe, but also elsewhere in the world, by developing the idea of the "freedom of navigation", by bringing exemplary safety standards into existence, and by presenting an international management model that has been imitated for other rivers.

The CCNR therefore feels justified in taking action in favour of the promotion of not only navigation on the Rhine but also the progress of inland navigation in general.

It is from this viewpoint that the CCNR decided, on the occasion of its French presidency, to organise a meeting of the authorities that manage inland waterways in various parts of the world, to tie in with the 2012 World Water Forum.

The aim of this meeting is to increase awareness of the globalisation process in inland navigation, and to determine what consequences may be drawn by the authorities managing inland waterways throughout the world.

We see this initiative on the part of the CCNR as both modest and ambitious. It is modest for a number of reasons.

Firstly, because awareness of the global dimension of inland navigation is not something new.

In this respect I would like to pay tribute to the substantial work PIANC has been doing for years, to ensure the exchange of information and common thinking on waterborne transport in general.

It is not in any way our intention with this initiative to disregard what PIANC is already doing, or to take its place. Our aim, on the contrary, is to support, extend and reinforce its work.

Other bodies have also already expressed themselves on the topic. I would like to mention specially:

- the Rivers of the World initiative, led by Dutch authorities and companies like the NEA
- the association: IWI Inland Waterway International which organises the World Canals Conference

Therefore, it is not our aim with this meeting to reinvent the wheel, nor to preach to the converted.

Secondly, we are not coming to this this meeting with new solutions, or any ready-made projects.

Furthermore, this meeting, which was organised rather late in the day, can only in the first instance bring together a small number of the stakeholders in the world's inland navigation.

For all these reasons, we intend to remain modest.

Our initiative is also ambitious nevertheless. It involves reaching beyond what is already done among a limited circle of stakeholders in inland navigation in the form of scattered initiatives.

We believe that in the past few years we have moved into a stage of acceleration in globalisation that totally changes the position of inland navigation, in terms not only of the technologies involved, but also of the economic context. The framework for the development of inland navigation is changing. Several river basins, particularly in the emerging countries, are becoming increasingly important, with the result that present-day inland navigation, which twenty years ago was limited to North America and western Europe, is taking on a truly global dimension. The industry that supplies navigation with hulls, engines, port infrastructures, information systems, etc has also become much more globalised in the past twenty years. Management and administrative regulation methods for river transport (ownership schemes, financing methods, the legal framework) that in the past were highly specific to each waterway are beginning to use the same language, even if they are not yet all saying the same thing.

We do not claim to be the discoverers of this evolution, but it is our ambition to gain a better understanding of it and rely more on that understanding in order to develop new strategies for promoting transport on inland waterways.

Our morning shall therefore enable us to collect and bring together some pieces in the puzzle, so that we will be able to see how to continue.

What we need to do this morning is:

- get to know each other better and expand the circle of partnerships; PIANC already constitutes a solid partnership, but in addition to the engineers and infrastructure specialists we need to bring in the managers of inland waterways, specialists in the economics of river transport, and representatives of the professional and industrial sectors concerned;
- determine more accurately what is already undertaken and what is not yet being done in terms of pooling information and experience. A priori, I think there is room to improve substantially the exchange of information, particularly with regard to the conditions for developing IWT markets: supply and demand: fleets and freight;
- define ways for a future strengthening of contacts and exchanges, perhaps even devising some forms of joint action.

So our morning will be an exploratory one. What stage have we reached? What do we know? Who does what? What could we work on together?

We have prepared a draft joint declaration for discussion. It is a document with limited aims, but its purpose is nevertheless to lend a degree of solemnity to our meeting.

We feel it is in fact important to reach a joint conclusion, even if it is a limited one. It could consist of the decision to create an Internet platform and to define of a route map for the next stages, if possible with a decision to hold another joint meeting in 2013. The Central Commission is prepared to offer its resources to achieve this.

I hope that these few words of introduction are in keeping with your expectations. Thank you for your attention. I invite you to start the discussion rolling.