



11th Meeting on the Follow-up of the Joint Statement on Guiding Principles on the development of Inland Navigation and Environmental Protection
Ms. Peijs's speech

SPEECH

Dear Danube friends,

It is a great honour for me to be here with you after all these complicated COVID-19 months.

I have never expected in all these years as Coordinator of this amazing Rhine-Danube Corridor to have to deal with the COVID-19 situation.

A situation, which made us wonder about many aspects of both our personal and professional lives. It is extremely complicated for a Coordinator not to visit her/his Corridor, to meet face to face and sit around the same table, and finally yet importantly, to visit our EU funded Actions sites. I missed deeply “coming to meet you, coming to speak to you”; this is what I truly enjoy in my job.

Therefore, today I would like to give you my wishes for the years to come in terms of Inland Navigation for our Corridor:

- ***“Keep your political commitment to increased navigation along the Danube”***
- When I look around, I see the colleagues from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, the

River Commissions and last but not least the representatives of the civil society who worked with us in the last years and I have to tell you that without the commitment of all of you around the table, our achievements would not be as outstanding as they are. For the first time since 2012, the Danube Ministers of Transport have signed the Danube Conclusions through email exchanges and I am glad you did. This year, with the difficult situation we are facing, these Conclusions, which clearly reaffirm your political commitment to making the Danube navigable for the entire society and the Danube stakeholders, are extremely important. In the framework of the “Green Deal”, inland waterway transport is paramount to achieve the set targets for making EU the first climate neutral continent. In this sense, I call upon all of you to continue working together with your neighbours in a joint effort to makes things happening fast. Cross-border cooperation along the Danube has to be our daily bread and butter. Working as individual Member States going into too many directions can puzzle our common efforts. We cannot afford this to happen today. We know and you all should know that when two Member States work together the sum of 1+1 equals more than two

- Romania and Bulgaria are already working together since many years and I am happy to see that no

matter the situation we are facing, this cooperation is still there and moving forward. Now, in the coming months, we would like to see the two countries getting together on a higher political level in order to ensure that a smooth governance structure is built for the future of the “FAST” project. We have no alternative and we need to obtain all environmental permits before the works could start in the next MFF with CEF2. Désirée will develop further in her speech on the issues related to Environment.

- Also, I would like to see Hungary and Slovakia getting back together and delivering on the promises they made to me. I will be looking forward to attend the meeting organised between these two countries in the coming weeks.
- Serbia and Croatia, I am really pleased to see that these two countries will start a new cooperation for the projects funded in the framework of the MAP Call 2019. I am looking forward to amazing results.

These are just few examples of what we should be looking at for our future.

- ***“Prioritise the funding for the future”***

- As it was clearly indicated in my 4th Rhine-Danube Work Plan, EU support, be it CEF or ESIF, only covers 7% of the Corridor investments needs overall; therefore, we need you, the Member States, to ensure funding for your IWW projects in the future. As much as the IWW sector will remain a priority for the next Multi Annual Financial Perspectives, there will still be the need of funding projects with only national resources. Therefore, I ask you to already start looking into this for the future so that you will be ready to clearly assess which projects should go for which funding and which projects should be funded through national budget only. Désirée and Barbara will be more than happy to support you throughout this exercise. As you know the first CEF 2 Call is not far away from today, therefore it is important to ensure that you are ready. It goes without saying that CEF will have to be concentrated on projects with the highest EU added value. CEF will not fund local or regional projects for which the Corridor impact is unclear.

- ***“Cooperation with the industry”***

- I will never be tired of repeating this point, especially in these kind of meetings where our focus is more directed to environmental and/or societal issues. We can build the best

network as we can, but if operators or transporters are not interested in sailing it, or in using the inland ports infrastructure, our results will not be worth the efforts. I am happy to communicate to you that the example of the network of Member States, waterway management authorities and industry operators built through the CEF Funded “FAIRway project” is now recognised as a very important instrument of cooperation and coordination that has to continue. The same should also happen for inland ports. I have already mentioned this point at the Corridor Forum in June and I would like to reiterate it here. Inland ports need to start working more both at national and international level together with the operators working in the different terminals. We need to create clusters, which will foster growth and economic development so that economies of scale can emerge at Corridor level.

- ***“Good Navigation Status together with Good Ecological Status”***
- The work at the Commission and the Experts Working group levels for the Good navigation status definition is advancing and hopefully things will get cleared by the time of the revision of the TEN-T guidelines. However, I need all Member States

around the table to make a huge effort to tackle the issues related to environment. Most of you are facing interruptions of projects because of issues related to the fact that national legislation in the field of environment is not compliant with the EU legislation in force. METEET has been extremely useful to all of you and has helped you planning projects in a way that obligations following EU legislation are met. However, at this point in time, this has to be done even better, we need to ensure that all projects funded by the EU are taking care of this point and that things are done differently. Désirée will develop further on this point.

In this point in time, we need to ensure that all efforts are coming to the results we were aiming for when we started together. Our job is restless and in situation like the one we are facing, we need to be stronger than the obstacles we are facing on our way. There is no turning back. To turn back is to declare that inland waterway transport will never be at the same level playing field with other means of transport. We cannot let this happen.

I know you can do it and I am here to both set our vision for the future and to support you in accomplishing that vision.

I thank you for your attention and wish you all a fruitful meeting.