JOINT STATEMENT ON INLAND NAVIGATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE DANUBE RIVER BASIN

April 25 – 26, 2007 Orth an der Donau, Austria

Facts and Perspectives of European Inland Waterway Transport – Focus on the Danube River Basin

Otto Schwetz, Manager of Corridor VII – Danube

As global freight transport volumes have increased, the external costs of traffic congestion, accidents, air pollution and noise have become more apparent, not only as an issue of concern for the quality of life, but also with respect to their potential for disrupting economic growth and mobility. As a result, one of the major challenges facing the transportation industry is the need to introduce a more efficient, modally integrated service, which utilizes spare capacity in other modes.

In this context, the EU initiative to promote alternative modes to road transport in order to alleviate road congestion, inland waterway transport and sea/river transport are considered as priorities in achieving the above goal. Navigation in the Danube should be seen in the above light. Moreover, inland waterway transport and sea/river transport are part of the EU initiative for promotion of short sea shipping, the "Motorways of the Seas".

Today, when the combined transport techniques have progressed so much, inland waterways can be used in the most efficient way. Their low external cost of transport, including the environmental benefits, can provide the critical factor to make an inland waterway route attractive. In this respect, Corridor VII, the Danube, can be seen as a very important transport artery, and as a route, efficiently incorporated in the logistics chains of many alternative origins/ destinations, from the Black Sea to the heart of Europe and the Atlantic, and vice-versa.

However, promotion of the Rhine/Danube waterway is an alternative not only in alleviating road transport but also in alleviating sea transport through the highly congested Bosporus straits.

There are several obstacles, i.e. "bottlenecks", connected with the navigation in the Danube, which prevent it from playing the role that it deserves and deploying its full potential. The Commission stated that: "*Infrastructure and legal problems regarding navigation on the Danube should be dealt with as a matter of priority in order to render it a major inland waterway to the common benefit of the EU* ". Is to be

considered, that the total length of the bottleneck – sections is altogether only 300 km from 2400 km navigable fairway of the Danube.

The optimization of the transport along Danube is dependent on a number of factors, which are interdependent and must be analyzed. Improving the navigation conditions for the majority of the cargoes transported on the Danube will only be beneficial if several issues are addressed

- Physical improvements of the river (through going depth, removal of shallow-narrow sections).
- Physical improvements to ports
- Improvements to shipyards
- Improvements to fleets
- Improvements to operations
- Institutional and legal issues.

As a consequence of the war in former Yugoslavia in the nineties, most of the riparian countries pay less attention to shipping than they normally would. The East European riparian countries were not really able to compensate for the losses caused by the slow, unreliable and expensive transport through the Yugoslavian section of the Danube. These events greatly affected the process of transformation of the shipping industry and greatly prevented a quick and successful transformation of the related services.

The inland waterway transport sector could capture cargoes from the road and rail sector provided that the service levels are improved. This can be achieved by, inter-alia, improving navigational conditions on the Danube. Economic developments in the region are promising, with the consequence, that the need for transport increases accordingly.

Traffic potential for the Danube may be considered as relatively high, because transport demand in the corridor is high, and the road network cannot absorb substantial new traffic because of its present saturation level. But waterway transport catches only the additional transport volume, which appears through the upcoming economies in the Danube basin and the increasing cargo volumes coming from Asia. It is to notice, that the inland navigation is therefore not a competition especially for the railways.
If an important transport demand exists for low value bulk commodities, there is also a growing demand for general cargo that can be transported in containers or RoRo vessels. This potential new traffic could be diverted to the Danube only if investments are made in order to transport these products efficiently.

It has been estimated that, if no major investment is made to improve navigation conditions on the Danube, to adapt port infrastructures and equipment to new transport demands (containers, RoRo) or to increase the efficiency of port operations, the traffic volume would increase slowly at an average rate of 1.4% per year. If some small size investments are realised to increase the efficiency of river transport and transhipments, and if most of the institutional and legal problems are gradually eliminated, traffic volume may increase at an average rate of 3% per year. If further actions are undertaken the traffic is forecasted to increase at a rate of 6% per year for the short and medium terms, and 3.5% per year afterwards.

There are many sources of potential financial assistance for the implementation of the required actions on the Danube River. Overall, according to reasonable estimates in order to improve the navigability of the Danube € 1,4 billion will be required.

It is stated very often, that inland navigation is the most environmentally transport mode. If we check the SO^2 production on the distance between Constantza and Vienna we find the following figures:

Inland Vessel: 349 kg CO^2/TEU
Rail: 567 kg CO^2/TEU (+ 62% compared to vessel)
Road: 933 kg CO^2/TEU (+167% compared to vessel**)**

On the other hand, in the last decade, national and international environmental initiatives have tried to remedy the environmental degradation of the Danube. The actions undertaken so far, especially the International Convention for the Protection of the Danube River have proved to be not so sufficient till now to reverse the environmental degradation and health problems. The main constraint appears to be that the Danube “hot spots" do not yet figure prominently in the national public investment priorities, nor are they part of comprehensive and sound strategies at national level. Therefore, there is a need for strengthened action to restore the environment of the region to a state that is acceptable for the people to live in. Out of this reason inland navigation is not an “enemy” to achieve this goal. Even if the riverbed has to be touched, it is always to take into consideration how the total environmentally balance looks like, if the SO^2 impact is reduced dramatically.

Corridor VII: The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the development of the Pan-European Transport Corridor VII – the Danube (the document was signed in Rotterdam, on 6/9/2001, between Transport Ministers of 10 European countries) highlights the need to strengthen the connections of the Danube with the Ten’s and the Black Sea. This MoU describes the intentions for a series of actions to be undertaken in order to achieve this goal.

The ultimate political goal is certainly the close linking of the Corridor VII to the rest of the Pan-European transport system. Thus, the optimisation of the Danube transport

is of major importance. However, the Danube is not only to be considered as Corridor VII and as such an integral part of the Pan-European Network; it is also a multi-modal transport corridor, and a link to other Corridors.

The development of Corridor VII -the Danube- is highly affected by the cooperation with the other multi-modal Transport Corridors. Inland waterway transport is, in essence, a multi-modal form where the operation to be carried out is in fact a chain in which each of the links contributes to the end result. More than other modes, inland waterway transport is therefore dependent on a development strategy, which supposes simultaneous removal of the various barriers and coherent development of the entire system. Action must therefore be taken to ensure fuller integration of the modes offering considerable potential transport capacity as links in an efficiently managed transport chain joining up all the individual services.

The improvement of the Danube as a main transport artery of Europe is also a central theme of the “Danube Co-operation Process (DCP)” which was started by a ministerial meeting in Vienna on May 27, 2002, continued by ministerial meetings 2004 in Bucharest and on April 18, 2007 in Belgrade. It was agreed, that the Danube as a cost-efficient and ecologically sustainable major European transport corridor should be used to its full capacity. For that purpose it would be necessary i.e. to:

- Set up National action Plans according to the NAIADES Programme of the European Union as it was done by Austria last year.

- improve navigability, thus allowing an uninterrupted passage (priority to be put on the “bottle necks” between Straubing and Vilshofen, between Vienna and the Austrian-Slovak border, Palcikovo - Mohács and the border section between Romania and Bulgaria).

- invest in Danube ports with a view to establishing multimodal centers for cargo distribution in accordance with the UN-ECE agreement on European inland waterways (AGN).

- set up a River Information Service (RIS).

- fund projects integrating inland navigation into the transport chain of different modes by intermodal nods.

- improve customs procedures, according to the proposals of the Danube Commission

- harmonise the regulative systems on the Danube and the Rhine.

In this process of the current seminar it is necessary to have in mind that we find different layers, but to concentrate on the basic layer of infrastructure and maintenance and how to find common principles and planning criteria.

And at least it is to mention, that sometimes it happens, that measures done for inland navigation are also for benefit for the environment.

.