



Press Release

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Inland Shipping and Ports Call for Ambitious Course for a Sustainable, Resilient, and Competitive Waterborne Future

EU Industrial Waterborne and Port Strategies: Contribution of the Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) and Ports sector

The European Union is embarking on a strategic transformation of its waterborne sector through the forthcoming **EU Industrial Waterborne Strategy** and **EU Port Strategy**, reaffirming its commitment to climate neutrality, industrial resilience, and technological leadership.

The waterborne sector—spanning maritime and inland navigation—is a cornerstone of Europe's economy and sustainability goals. It brings together a diverse ecosystem of shipowners, ports, infrastructure and service providers, shipbuilders, classification societies, equipment manufacturers, research institutions, and more. The sector has come together to give an in-depth contribution [LINK TO ADD] on the forthcoming strategies as their consultations open.

A Backbone of Europe's Industrial and Environmental Vitality

Europe's rivers, canals, seas, and ports are more than transit routes—they are lifelines for the continent's industrial and ecological health. Nearly 50% of Europeans live near coastlines or major rivers, and major centres of production and consumption are concentrated along waterways. Inland waterway transport (IWT) enables the safe, efficient, and low-emission movement of key goods—steel, chemicals, agri-products, alternative fuels, oversized cargo, and more—relieving pressure on congested land networks. while offering increased opportunities for sustainable tourism and recreation. Disruptions to this network can ripple across downstream supply chains, impacting industry, water and food security alike. Inland ports, acting as multimodal hubs and industrial clusters, are expanding their role in the renewable energy eco-system and the circular economy.



Twin Transition at the Heart of Strategy

The EU Industrial Waterborne Strategy and EU Port Strategy are designed to accelerate the **green and digital transition** of the entire waterborne value chain and set a roadmap for innovation, investment, and resilience. As input to these strategies, the IWT and ports sector highlights its vision around a number of key areas, and calls for the following policy actions:

1. **Fostering innovation** from early research to market deployment across the full value chain;
2. Creating a **pro-innovation regulatory framework** that ensures legal certainty and unlocks private and public investment;
3. Establishing a **stable, accessible funding system** tailored especially to the needs of SMEs.

Ports and Shipbuilding as Pillars of Sovereignty and Security

Ports are positioned as engines of **industrial activity, green energy hubs, and logistical gateways** that extend Europe's trade network. They also play a critical role in security and military mobility, hosting infrastructure and assets essential to Europe's strategic autonomy. Shipyards and equipment manufacturers are recognized as vital for the EU's capacity to build complex, high-tech vessels and equipment. Investments in these sectors will drive decarbonization, digitalization, and the broader sustainability and resilience agenda—while securing Europe's leadership in maritime innovation.

Putting People at the Core

These strategies not only aim to transform industry—they also place people at the centre. Addressing labour and skills shortages, promoting workforce upskilling, and supporting quality employment are pivotal to delivering on the sector's vision.

Building a Stronger Waterborne Ecosystem

Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) and Ports play a crucial role in achieving Europe's **climate neutrality, economic resilience and strategic autonomy** and are a competitive and crucial component of the Clean Industrial Deal and the Waterborne ecosystem.

Supporting Organisations



Inland Navigation Europe (INE) is the European Platform of waterway authorities and bodies promoting transport by water, working together to improve waterway infrastructure for navigation and other important economic and societal functions.

Contact: Karin De Schepper kds@inlandnavigation.eu



The European Barge Union (EBU) represents the inland navigation industry in Europe. Its members are the national associations of barge owners and barge operators of 9 European inland navigation countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Romania and Switzerland).

Contact: Theresia Hacksteiner Contact: hacksteiner@ebu-uenf.org



The European Skippers Organisation is the voice of the independent Inland Waterway Transport entrepreneurs. ESO looks after the interests of the barge owners at European level with representatives from 6 European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, UK and Poland).

Contact: Gerard Kester gkmkester.eso@gmail.com



As an executive body of EBU and ESO, the European IWT platform aims at a stronger positioning of Inland Navigation in European and national transport policies by an intensified contribution to various governing bodies, working parties and standard setting committees like CESNI and ADN.

Contact: Fulvio Esposito www.inlandwaterwaytransport.eu



Europe's inland ports, Enablers of Green Logistics, are represented since 1994 by the European Federation of Inland Ports. EFIP consists of nearly 200 inland ports located in 18 Member States of the EU and Switzerland, Serbia and Ukraine.

Contact: Turi Fiorito turi.fiorito@inlandports.be



The industry-oriented Waterborne Technology Platform establishes a continuous dialogue between all waterborne stakeholders and EU Institutions, including Member States.

Contact: Jaap Gebraad jaap.gebraad@waterborne.eu



The EICB aims to make inland waterways transport more economically attractive and innovative by investigating opportunities & threats, and propose next steps such as market stimulation via promotion, innovation, fleet renewal, reinforcement & security of the chain, ICT, elimination of bottlenecks in the physical, logistical and knowledge infrastructure.

Contact: Martin Quispel m.quispel@eicb.nl



The EU-funded PLATINA4Action project aims to promote inland waterway transport in Europe through targeted coordination and support activities. It bridges the gap between current IWT research and future innovation needs, focuses on deploying green and connected inland waterway transport, evaluates NAIADES III, and prepares a policy agenda. *This project received funding from Horizon Europe research and innovation programme of the European Union under grant agreement No 101137650.*

Contact: Martin Quispel m.quispel@eicb.nl