

Opening Speech –Workshop of new markets for IWT - 24 June 2026

- Thanks to CCNR for organising the workshop and Belgium for hosting participants in Brussels
- purpose of today's workshop: better understanding of future cargo flows for inland navigation
- many traditional cargo markets are changing. Traditional shipping of large volumes of carbon-intensive bulk goods — such as coal, petroleum products, steel, and chemicals are declining.
- But with the environmental and economic need for energy and industrial transitions new opportunities arise. We already see changing logistics patterns across Europe.
- The energy transition and the circular economy need the transport capacities that IWT can provide: large scale transport of renewable energies (hydrogen, ammonia methanol...), carbon capture and storage chains as well as the supply chains for bio-based materials. Recycling, building, demolition streams and scrap steel also create fresh demand for inland navigation.
- We are living in difficult times for the world and for Europe. The future prosperity of our society depends also on your sector. You need to provide the transport capacity that can allow new circular industries to grow and for clean and homemade energies to reach our citizens and businesses. I am eager to learn from you where you see concrete new or growing opportunities and also where you have already taken action to serve future demands.
- Together with you, we want to discuss how:
 - Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) can become an even stronger pillar in Europe's logistics system and a key enabler of the EU's transition to a net-zero economy.
 - new markets can create long-term opportunities for the sector.
 - Jointly we can create viable economic perspectives for the sector;
- You did not come here to discuss theory (and neither have my colleagues nor I), but:
 - We want to bring together concrete industrial and operational perspectives.
 - involve industries that may generate future cargo flows.
 - hear from inland navigation operators about practical realities and difficulties.
- Developing these new markets can only work in cooperation across the full chain: industry; ports; logistics operators; waterway authorities; policymakers.
- The Commission is here to listen and learn from stakeholders:
 - what opportunities seem realistic;
 - what barriers exist today;
 - what investments or rules may be needed.
- Today's results will feed into our future European inland waterway policy, the follow up of Naiades III in 2028, as announced in the Ports and maritime industrial strategies