

PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Resolution 1473 (2005)¹ **European waterways: focus on the Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal project**

1. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) have repeatedly stressed the importance of improving waterway connections between and within European countries. They have pointed to the value of inland waterways in providing a comparatively cheap, energy-efficient, clean, safe and reliable mode of transport for many goods, especially bulky cargo and raw and intermediate materials, as well as containers. Moreover, waterways play an important role in: water management, such as water and electricity supply; flood prevention; irrigation; multimodal passenger traffic; and tourism and recreation.

2. Transportation requirements throughout Europe are increasing by about 2% a year, owing to economic growth, intensified trade and travel, and the integration of systems of production. This increase is met essentially through an expansion of road capacity and air traffic. However, the rising congestion of Europe's roads and, to a certain extent, its airspace as well, suggests that at least some of the burden should be taken over by railways and waterways, which operate well below capacity and hence offer a strong potential for optimising overall traffic, notably through combined transport involving road, rail and waterways. In addition, waterways can sometimes play an important role in regulating the water system, for example through the creation of wetlands, to avoid the flooding of farmland and residential areas in certain regions.

3. The Assembly therefore believes that there is a strong case for enhancing interconnections and increasing the density of the European waterway network. This is particularly true for central Europe, where most of the inland waterway traffic is concentrated and where important links are missing. The Danube – Europe's second longest river and an artery connecting Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine – is rightly recognised, along with the Rhine, as a crucial, though underutilised, part of the inland transport network.

4. Against the background of European Union enlargement and its Common Transport Policy, the Assembly draws particular attention to the Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal project, a corridor planned as part of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and the European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance. Although this canal project has not yet been included in a revised TEN-T priority list, it is mentioned in the European Union

accession treaty, and deserves greater attention as the European Union pursues integration of its new member states and seeks to maximise the benefits of trade and competition under the Internal Market.

5. Taking into account the general importance of promoting multimodal transport and the regional need to enhance waterway navigation in central Europe, the Assembly calls on the member states concerned to accelerate feasibility studies and political consultations on the Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal project, including a thorough cost-benefit analysis and a strategic environmental assessment in line with relevant European Union norms and international treaties. The feasibility studies should be divided into stages and the conception of the route should be optimised, taking account of recent trends in inland navigation, flood prevention, water transfer projects and water management.

6. The Assembly welcomes the consultation process launched by the European Commission with a view to presenting a communication on the promotion of inland waterway transport by the end of 2005, including an action programme for 2006-2013 by the European Community and other parties. The Assembly asks the Council of Europe member states concerned to contribute actively to the work on this communication, especially as regards recommendations for action.

7. More generally, in order to render waterway transport more accessible, efficient, competitive and environmentally sustainable, the Assembly invites the Council of Europe member states to:

7.1. work for the continued improvement of inland navigational infrastructure and technology;

7.2. study the possibilities of using waterway infrastructure to a greater extent for protection against flooding, improved water resources management and the sustainable development of adjacent regions;

7.3. provide incentives for the development of combined transport services that incorporate waterway segments;

7.4. ensure close co-ordination of measures destined to develop short-sea shipping and river-sea transport systems;

7.5. pursue pan-European harmonisation of technical norms and regulations for inland vessels, loading units and traffic, under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the European Union;

7.6. study the possible environmental impact of the increase in traffic of passenger, commercial and tourism vessels on European waterways.

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 25 November 2005 (see Doc. 10730, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Braun; and Doc. 10738, opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Kužvart).*