Roadmap - Ares(2020)7727991

Freshwater ecosystems are among the most threatened globally, while in Europe they show major deficits with up to 75% of the species being in a threatened or critically endangered state as drastically exemplified by Europe`s sturgeons (Living Planet Rep. 2020). Given the pressure that inland waterway transportation (IWT) exert on aquatic ecosystems (art 785 of SWD (2020), we call on the European Commission to ensure full compliance of the NAIADES III Action Plan (AP) with environmental policies such as the Water Framework Directive (WFD), the Floods Directive, the Habitats Directive, and the EU Biodiversity Strategy targets (e.g. restoring 25,000 km of free-flowing rivers).

In its December 2020 resolution, the EU Parliament noted “that the shift from road freight to inland waterways should be fully consistent with the non-deterioration principle of the WFD, as well as with other environmental legislation, including the Birds and Habitats Directives [...]”.

The desired “continuous financial support aimed at improving the quality and the climate resilience of inland waterways infrastructure, including the inland ports infrastructure“, must be based upon cross sectoral benefits of projects which must be verified carefully, while subsidies must only be granted if the measures are implementing EU environmental policy, especially the WFD (IGB 2019).

We herewith request the EU Commission to:

- Adapt the definition “sustainable development” of the IWT not to solely focus on modal shift, pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions, but to meet the Green Deal objectives such as protecting biodiversity, ensuring resilience to climate change, and compliance with the “do no harm” principle.
- Add all environmental pressures on river bodies caused by IWT to the challenges that NAIADES III aims to address. IWT infrastructures modify hydromorphology and fragment riverine ecosystems, deteriorate habitat for protected species such as sturgeons, pollute water and sediment. Hydromorphological pressures are among the most important impacts impeding the achievement of the Good Ecological Potential/Good Ecological Status. The “WFD Fitness Check” has highlighted the need to better integrate with navigation.
- Add to the objectives of the AP to ensure the projected IWT developments support the targets of the WFD; the management of flood risks and the resilience to increasing water shortages and drought.
- Outline how “integrative approaches among all water users towards ecologic, societal, economic and safety-related functions” will be promoted and how the priorities are to be set. All relevant stakeholders, including environmental organizations, must be included in the planning process for each of the navigation projects and maintenance measures to reach commonly accepted and synergistic solutions. The process under C. is definitely not sufficient to meet this target.

- Strengthen capacity building on environmental aspects for engineers and administrators involved in IWT projects.
- Extend the scope of innovation from energy consumption and emissions to ship design for navigating feasibly at fluctuating water levels and with negligible impact on aquatic life (e.g. ship-induced waves).
- Prioritize projects that ensure: natural hydromorphological processes; the use of nature-based solutions; habitat protection for endangered species; long-term ecological impact monitoring and effective restoration measures such as side channel reconnection.
- Refrain from funding projects that promote the damming of rivers, cause drastic alteration of the hydromorphology, and subsequent floodplain disconnection.
- The “reinforced role of the EU Coordinators for better coordination of national /corridor plans…” has to address the global importance of the impact of IWT on aquatic life. Transport-related and environmental requirements must be reflected in the coordination structure.