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Working Party on the Standardization of Technical and Safety Requirements in Inland Navigation

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Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda

**Outcome of the High-Level Conference on Inland Water Transport
(22 February 2017, Geneva) and the first meeting of ad hoc group
for the preparation of the Global Conference on Inland Water Transport:
First meeting of the ad hoc group for the preparation
of the Global Conference on Inland Water Transport**

Report of the Preparatory Meeting of Experts for the Global Conference on Inland Water Transport (22 February 2017)

Note by the secretariat

I. Mandate

1. This document is submitted in line with cluster 5: Inland Waterway Transport, para. 5.1 of the programme of work 2016-2017 (ECE/TRANS/2016/28/Add.1) adopted by the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) at its seventy-eighth session on 26 February 2016.
2. The preparatory meeting of experts for the Global Conference on Inland Water Transport was held on 22 February 2017, in the afternoon, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of ITC.
3. The main discussions and conclusions of the meeting are presented below.

II. Background

4. The UNECE White Paper on Efficient and Sustainable Inland Water Transport in Europe, endorsed by ITC in 2011, under Policy Recommendation No. 4 on responding effectively to new market requirements, proposed organizing an international conference for countries with a vested interest in inland navigation in order to continue raising awareness of the advantages of inland water transport in comparison with and/or in conjunction with other modes of transport (ECE/TRANS/SC.3/189, para. 216).

5. The high-level conferences on inland water transport held in Europe over the past 30 years boosted the coordinated development of inland waterways, proposed harmonized action plans towards improving the role of inland water transport and laid down the foundations of new multimodal network of Pan-European transport corridors. They include:

- the Pan-European Ministerial Conference dedicated to Timely Issues of Inland Waterway Transport held on 11 September 1991 (Budapest);
- the Pan-European Conference on inland waterway transport held on 5 and 6 September 2001 in Rotterdam (Netherlands);
- the Pan-European Conference on inland waterway transport held on 13 and 14 September 2006 in Bucharest which was followed up by Resolution No. 258 “Supporting further development of inland water transport” adopted by ITC on 8 February 2007.

6. Following the Recommendation of the White Paper and bearing in mind the evolution and achievements of the transport policy, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, the Paris Climate Agreement, current trends in the sector and priorities laid down in regional and national development strategies, ITC organized the preparatory meeting of experts for the Global Conference on Inland Water Transport.

III. Attendance

7. More than 40 participants from Belarus, Belgium, China, Croatia, Egypt, Malaysia, Republic of Moldova, Niger, Nigeria, Paraguay, Poland, Russian Federation, Sudan, Uganda, Ukraine and Viet Nam; Central Commission for the Navigation on the Rhine, Danube Commission, Mosel Commission, International Labour Office (ILO), Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European Barge Union (EBU), European River-Sea Transport Union (ERSTU), European Shippers’ Council, International Association for the representation of the mutual interests of the inland shipping and the insurance and for keeping the register of inland vessels in Europe (IVR), Russian Association of Ports and Shipowners of River Transport, Russian Chamber of Shipping, STC-Nestra B. V., World Bank Group and other relevant organizations attended the meeting.

8. Mr. Francesco Dionori, Chief of Transport Networks and Logistics Section of the UNECE Sustainable Transport Division, opened and chaired the meeting following the agenda proposed by the secretariat.

IV. Outcome of the High Level Conference on Inland Water Transport (22 February 2017, the morning session): main points and issues to be considered for the preparation of the Global Conference on Inland Water Transport (item 1 of the agenda)

9. It was recalled that the conference had brought together representatives from several United Nations Member States, River Commissions and international organizations. The conclusions made at the conference confirmed that general issues and challenges should be addressed at a global level. Sharing best practice and strengthening collaboration would contribute to efficient solutions on how to increase the modal share of inland water transport, improve the governance of the sector and garner much needed political support. It was further mentioned that international conventions under the auspices of ITC provide a technical and operational basis for efficient functioning of inland water transport, and therefore there is a need to encourage states to become Contracting Parties of the Conventions.

10. It was pointed out by EBU that the European industry would welcome a conference dedicated to inland water transport organized by UNECE following the experience of previous pan-European conferences. She stressed the need that the sector join forces to extract its huge, still untapped, potential and that this needed to be accompanied by significant political support at the highest level as the grounds for the conference.

11. European Shippers' Council pointed out that many interesting topics were addressed at the conference, and highlighted among them digitalization, environmental aspects and intermodality. Given the strong link between digitalization and inland water transport, he expressed the opinion that it would be useful to organize a similar event dedicated to the link between technical standards and the digitalization.

12. The Russian Federation proposed the core topics to be addressed at the present meeting as:

- the purpose of the conference that could be possibly expressed by a short slogan;
- issues that could be addressed at the global level;
- expected outcome and benefits for governments and the business sector.

13. Given the regional nature of inland water transport, the Russian Federation was of the opinion that mainly issues of a general nature should be addressed at a broader level, including: the exchange of technologies, views and best practices, possible unification of technical standards and administrative regulations and possible economic approaches.

14. The participants mentioned that the outcome of the conference should be well documented and the presentations should be available.

V. Presentation of ideas to establish a Global Knowledge Centre on inland water transport (item 2 of the agenda)

15. The participants took note of the information by the World Bank Group about the concept of setting up a global knowledge centre on inland water transport as a facility allowing to exchange the information on issues of common interest, relevant to most of the countries possessing navigable waterways, capturing best practices and lessons learned.

They could include the greening of the fleet, implementing programs for innovations and modernization of the fleet, reclassification of waterways, economic measures for the support of the sector, the engagement of private sector and other relevant issues.

16. The participants agreed that the idea of establishing a global knowledge centre on inland water transport could be considered at the conference.

VI. Purpose and scope of the Global Conference on inland water transport (item 3 of the agenda)

17. The participants took note of the presentation by the secretariat on the proposed purpose of the conference “Fostering the role of inland water transport in the world addressing the Sustainable Development Goals”, a draft programme, the expected outcome and possible topics for panel discussions. It was proposed to invite all countries with a vested interest to inland water transport, Regional Commissions of the United Nations, River Commissions, Basin Development Organizations and other intergovernmental organizations, regional integration organizations, international and national non-governmental organizations and other key players.

18. European Shippers’ Council pointed out that the programme of the conference could be extended to issues beyond, but relevant to, inland water transport including terminals, deep-sea shipping and other modes of transport linked to inland water transport.

VII. Potential outcome for the Conference (item 4 of the agenda)

19. The Russian Federation pointed out that the outcome of the conference should have a practical value for waterways, ports, shipping companies, administrations in terms of safety, environmental aspect and benefits for the economy. To this end, it was necessary to identify the challenges for inland water transport, the assistance that could be rendered in resolving them, as well as the domains where inland water transport was advantageous and therefore competitive in relation to road and rail transport. The Russian Federation considered that, due to the regional nature of inland water transport, there was no need for global regulation or global instruments to be applied universally.

20. As the outcome, and in relation to the purpose of the Conference, the Russian Federation proposed the following topics:

- capacity building and assistance to countries in building up a solid regulatory framework aimed at increasing the efficiency of inland water transport;
- recommendations on ensuring the appropriate balance among all transport modes;
- recommendations on appropriate financial and economic mechanisms that can be used to encourage the construction of new vessels;
- a scientific study of hydrometeorological conditions of major rivers of the world in order to determine the trends affecting navigation for a long-term period. Its results would allow the planning of business activities by shipping companies for longer periods based on the estimated medium 20 year life cycle of river vessels.

21. The Russian Federation proposed to focus on concrete tasks with a practical effect rather than general statements to avoid creating undue burden on the sector which is already stretched.

22. European Shippers' Council pointed out that the attractiveness of the sector to the market should be addressed by highlighting the strengths of inland waterways and the reliability of inland water transport in supply chains.

23. The Russian Chamber of Shipping was of the opinion that the final act of the conference should, in addition to political declarations and statements, reflect the macroeconomic consequences of the full use of the capacities of all transport modes and propose recommendations for Governments and the business sector for streamlining cargo flows. To achieve this, there is a need for a scientific study of macroeconomic impacts to be determined for each transport mode carrying particular freight types that could identify the estimation criteria with due regard of conditions and capacities in different countries.

VIII. Venue and dates of the Conference (item 5 of the agenda)

24. Following some discussion, the participants agreed to consider March 2018 as a provisional date for the conference. Discussions on potential venues remain ongoing.

IX. Conclusions and next steps (item 6 of the agenda)

25. The Russian Federation pointed out that it was essential to ensure the success of the conference, since it would be the first global-scaled event. The success can be achieved on condition that all the above items are resolved and the preparatory work is done in due time.

26. Regarding the preparatory work, the Russian Federation further mentioned that it was necessary to identify the timeline, the scope of activities, prepare the work plan and decide on the necessary number of meetings of experts involved in it.

27. The participants decided to establish the ad hoc group for all necessary preparations for the conference. All interested parties were asked to nominate their representatives for the ad hoc group. It was decided to organize its first meeting at the next session of the Working Party on the Standardization of Technical and Safety Requirements in Inland Navigation from 14 to 16 June 2017. Further work will be done through virtual meetings and by correspondence before and after this date.

28. The secretariat was asked to prepare a summary of the discussion and a proposal for a timeline and a draft programme for the lead-up to the Conference.
