

Distr.: Restricted
29 May 2017
English
Original: English and Russian only

Working Party on Inland Water Transport

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

Fifty-first session

Geneva, 14-16 June 2017

Agenda item 5 (b)

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

Draft background paper for the International Conference on Inland Waterway Transport “Fostering the Role of Inland Water Transport in the World within the Framework of the Sustainable Development Agenda”

Note of the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. Inland water transport is a fundamental link in global and regional transport networks and the supply chain for a number of industries. Its importance is growing in a number of regions across the world and as such the international community needs to focus on its future.
2. The UNECE White Paper on Efficient and Sustainable Inland Water Transport in Europe, endorsed by the UNECE Inland Transport Committee (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 (ECE/TRANS/SC.3/189, para. 216).
3. Following this policy recommendation, this international conference on inland water transport planned for 2018 could be the next milestone in creating an enabling environment for inland water transport to grow and thus contribute to a modal split that benefits from all modes of transport, highlighting the initiatives aiming to improve the role of inland waterways in secure transport chains at the global level and respond effectively to new challenges and market requirements.

II. Background

4. 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.

5. The International High-Level Conference “Steering towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda: The role, challenges and opportunities for inland water transport” was held in Geneva on 22 February 2017 on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of ITC (ECE/TRANS/SC.3/WP.3/2017/18). It brought together representatives from several United Nations member States, River Commissions and international organizations.

6. The conclusions made at the conference confirmed that general issues and challenges may 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 states could be invited to improve regulatory governance at the regional and global level using this example.

7. At the Preparatory Meeting of Experts for the Global Conference on Inland Water Transport (22 February 2017) it was noted that the outcome of the conference is expected to have a practical value for stakeholders in charge of inland shipping, inland waterways and ports in terms of safety, environmental aspect and benefits for the economy. The Conference is expected 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 is advantageous and therefore competitive in relation to road and rail transport (ECE/TRANS/SC.3/WP.3/2017/19).

8. It was decided to consider April 2018 as a provisional date for the conference. Discussions on potential venues remain ongoing.

III. Purpose and desired outcome

9. In light of the 2030 Agenda and the adopted Sustainable Development Goals, this International Conference would raise global awareness about the importance of inland navigation. Therefore, the main theme of the International Conference could be tasks and challenges in the inland water transport sector with regard to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

10. In case the International Conference has as one of its main focus areas the role of inland water transport in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, the following Sustainable Development Goals relevant to inland water transport could be priorities for the

discussion, including the contribution of inland water transport in their implementation and monitoring indicators:

- Sustainable Development Goal 3 — Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Sustainable Development Goal 7 — Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Sustainable Development Goal 9 — Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Sustainable Development Goal 11 — Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Sustainable Development Goal 13 — Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

11. The aim of the conference is to gather governments, regional integration organizations, UN Regional Commissions, River Commissions, international and public organizations and other key stakeholders to discuss key issues in the sector with the desired outcome being the increased political commitment for the development of inland water transport through the breaking down of barriers around the world and through harmonisation that can be reflected in a ministerial declaration, thus increasing the importance of the sector, ensuring stronger regulatory framework and eliminating barriers, using as an example the experience of UN Conventions and Agreements relevant to inland water transport and the activities of UNECE and other UN Regional Commissions.

12. The declaration could have a set of main objectives, such as fostering the role of inland water transport, maximising the potential of inland waterways through the setting up of appropriate regulatory framework, addressing the challenges of sustainable development of mobility and encouraging investment in the sector. Based on these objectives, the declaration could determine strategic actions to pursue in the coming years which could include such areas as: building up a solid regulatory framework aimed at increasing the efficiency of inland water transport, ensuring the appropriate balance among all transport modes, streamlining cargo flows and promoting intermodality, encouraging the construction of new vessels and fostering innovations, facilitating the building inland waterway infrastructure that resilient to climate changes, promoting the attractiveness of the sector to the freight and passenger market and increasing its competitiveness. The declaration may also point to the need to have concrete action plans developed to implement these strategic actions.

IV. Participants

13. Given the desired outcome, the main participants to the conference are expected to be:

- Ministers from countries with a vested interest to inland water transport (about 100 countries)
- River Commissions, the European Union and Basin Development Organizations
- UN Regional Commissions and agencies (UNDP, UNCTAD, ILO, IMO, etc.)
- Regional integration organizations, IFIs, NGOs, public organizations and national associations.

14. The estimated number of participants is up to 300.

V. Outline of the Conference

15. The conference may be divided into a number of sessions and/or panel discussions over a 1.5 day period. During the first day, a plenary session could be held in the morning; the adoption of the final act could be planned at the end of the first day.

16. Topics for panel discussions could include:

(a) The coordinated development of inland water transport across the world

Panel discussion on how the inland water transport sector has developed over time, what have been the significant achievements and where the barriers to further development have been. Experiences from river basins and River Commissions from around the world and how this can be best used for future development of the sector. Also, what are the next steps and how technical harmonisation can play a role?

(b) The role of inland water transport in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Panel discussion on how inland water transport contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals. Presentations from countries and other key players on what they are doing to aid in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

(c) UN legal instruments

Discussion on how UN international conventions and agreements relevant to inland water transport have made a difference. Experiences from Contracting Parties and why they are important (potential contributions from the River Commissions also). Their relevance outside Europe.

(d) Future of inland water transport, technological progress and innovations

Exchanging best practices on what innovations have taken place in the sector, where have they been successful and where could significant additional efforts be made. The interconnection between inland water transport and intelligent transport systems could be addressed as well.

(e) Major international projects and investments in inland waterways

Examples of where investment in the sector has been directed and how it has helped the surrounding area as well as the longer supply chain.

(f) Working and education in inland navigation

Discussion on how to make the sector more attractive for employees through improving working environment, social protection and the quality of education and training and creating favourable conditions for that; increasing the mobility of crews.

17. Stakeholders may choose to propose other topics for discussion at the event either as one of the main sessions or as side events.

VI. Logistical arrangements

18. The host country will make necessary arrangements for the conference location and facilities. Further details will be agreed with the host country. During the conference there will be a possibility to organize side events.