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Current situation and trends in inland water transport: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on inland navigation and enhancing resilience to international emergency situations

Modifications to international conventions and agreements relevant to inland water transport and resolutions of the Economic Commission for Europe aimed to enhance resilience to pandemics and similar situations

Note by the secretariat*

I. Mandate

1. This document is submitted in line with the Proposed Programme Budget for 2021, part V, Regional cooperation for development, section 20, Economic Development in Europe. Programme 17, Economic Development in Europe (A/75/6 (Sect.20), para. 20.51).
2. At its sixty-fourth session, the Working Party on Inland Water Transport (SC.3) found it desirable to make an assessment of international conventions and agreements under the purview of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and SC.3 resolutions in the field of inland water transport in terms of preparedness for pandemics and similar situations (ECE/TRANS/SC.3/213, para. 17).

II. Exceptional measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learned

3. Based on the information transmitted by member States and river commissions (ECE/TRANS/SC.3/2020/2), the exceptional measures implemented in the sector in response to the COVID-19 pandemic included:
 - Development of pandemic emergency plans and other measures to ensure the proper organization of work under the pandemic situation

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

- Special safety and health protection measures for the waterway personnel, crews and passengers on inland waterway vessels
 - Validity and renewal of certificates and attestations of crew members, certificates of special knowledge, certificates of approval and provisional certificates of approval according to of the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterways (ADN), service record books, logbooks and vessels' documents
 - Facilitation of the mobility of crew members to enable them to make the direct journey from their place of residence to the port of embarkation and from the port of disembarkation to their place of residence and special procedures for the replacement of crew members
 - Special measures during cargo loading and unloading operations, the replenishment of fuel, water and food supplies and vessel repairs
 - Measures to ensure safe operation of bridges, locks and other permanent waterway structures and smooth operation of River Information Services (RIS)
 - Suspension of passenger navigation and recreational navigation, special measures for passenger vessels engaged in international cruises, development of passenger ship operation plans and other measures.
4. Among lessons learned were mentioned:
- The need for an efficient cross-border consultation in order to ensure the continuity of cross-border navigation, such as transitional provisions related to the certification of the staff and vessels, operation hours of locks and movable bridges and other relevant aspects
 - The need to adapt the existing practice to effectively respond in case of natural disasters in order to prevent their spread, impact and consequences
 - The establishment of communication platforms to bring together the stakeholders from the economy, the infrastructure services, transport users and other key players
 - The need to improve the coordination between countries and national transport authorities, further collect information and improve coordination and cooperation at the international level.
5. SC.3 may wish to consider the following proposals for possible modifications to the conventions, agreements relevant to inland water transport and SC.3 resolutions aimed to enhance resilience of the sector to the pandemics situations and ensure an efficient response to pandemics situations, the continuity of navigation and safety of crews and passengers, based on the exceptional measures implemented by member States and lessons learned.

III. Possible modifications to international conventions and agreements under the purview of the Economic Commission for Europe relevant to inland water transport

A. European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance

6. Annex III to the European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance (AGN) establishes operational criteria for E waterways in order to be able to ensure reliable international traffic. In accordance with the annex, through traffic should be ensured throughout the navigation period, with the exception of:

- (a) Breaks caused by natural phenomena such as ice, floods, etc., which should be kept to a minimum by appropriate technical and organizational measures;

(b) Breaks in the navigation period for regular maintenance of locks and other hydraulic works. In cases of unforeseen failure of locks or other hydraulic facilities, or other force majeure, the duration of breaks should be kept as limited as possible using all appropriate measures to remedy the situation.

7. Therefore, navigation breaks due to pandemics are not specifically addressed in AGN and measures to remedy the situation may be beyond the control of contracting parties. SC.3 may wish to consider the following proposals to annex III for operational criteria for E waterways:

(a) Subparagraph (v), *modify*

Operating hours of locks, movable bridges and other infrastructure works shall be such that round-the-clock (24-hour) navigation can be ensured on working days, if economically feasible. In specific cases, exceptions may be allowed due to organizational and/or technical reasons **or under exceptional circumstances due to pandemics and other natural disasters**. Reasonable hours of navigation should also be ensured during public holidays and at weekends.

(b) *Add a new subparagraph (vi)*

Breaks caused by pandemics and other natural disasters. The duration of breaks should be kept as limited as possible and timely measures should be undertaken to mitigate their impacts and prevent their spread and consequences.

8. SC.3 may also wish consider the following proposal for technical and operational characteristics of E ports:

Add a new subparagraph (ix)

In case of pandemics and other natural disasters, it should ensure cargo loading and unloading operations, the replenishment of fuel, water and food supplies and other essential operations for the continuity of navigation.

B. Other conventions and agreements

9. The Convention relating to the Unification of Certain Rules concerning Collisions in Inland Navigation, the Convention on the Registration of Inland Navigation Vessels and the Convention on the Measurement of Inland Navigation Vessels are not directly related to special circumstances due to the pandemics situation.

IV. Possible modifications to resolutions adopted by the Working Party on Inland Water Transport

10. Resolution No. 21, revision 2, Prevention of Pollution of Inland Waterways by Vessels (ECE/TRANS/SC.3/179/Rev.1) has established general pollution prevention policy considerations and the recommendations for the control of pollution of inland waterways. The annex to the resolution could be complemented with recommendations aimed at ensuring the availability of reception facilities for transfer of waste from vessels on the E waterway network in case of pandemics. Furthermore, the list of reception facilities for transfer of waste from vessels contained in the appendix could include general safety provisions and/or special instructions for boatmasters in case of pandemics.

11. In the European Code for Inland Waterways (CEVNI), special provisions could be introduced to (a) article 1.22, which contains provisions for special temporary requirements issued by a competent authority in special circumstances to ensure safe and orderly navigation, and (b) chapter 7 Berthing rules, in case the general principles of berthing cannot be fully applied or the application of certain navigation signs is restricted.

12. SC.3 may wish to add special provisions related to safety of crews, onboard personnel and passengers to resolution No. 61, Recommendations on Harmonized Europe-Wide Technical Requirements for Inland Navigation Vessels. This issue could be further investigated by the Working Party on the Standardization of Technical and Safety Requirements in Inland Navigation.
