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Waterways of tomorrow

European Parliament, 9 December 2003

Conclusions

For some people waterways transportation is the most environmentally sound transport solution, for others it constitutes a threat to the water environment. Both transport and environment play an important role in the socio-economic development of our continent. The common transport policy looks for sustainable ways to cope with the challenge of growing traffic, while environmental policy aims to protect Europe's environment for the next generations.

The workshop of today gathered environmental experts, waterway managers and policy makers to exchange views on best practices enhancing the development of sustainable waterway transport. It became clear that inland shipping on both rivers and canals does not necessarily conflict with an environmental protection policy if certain conditions are met. The set of EU legislation and procedures, in particular the water framework directive, guarantees that the situation of waterways and their water environment does not deteriorate. Moreover, authorities and waterway managers take a new integrated approach when developing and maintaining waterway infrastructure. More and more often an in-depth dialogue between all stakeholders of the involved region takes place before starting new infrastructure works in order to harmonise the functions of waterways. These functions are multiple. Apart from transport and environment, water supply, flood protection, and recreation are carefully examined. The added value of a more integrated policy is to achieve win-win situations. Last but not least, considerable progress is being made with the development of environmentally beneficial waterway management techniques.

Exchanges of this kind contribute to a sharing of experiences among experts at European level, and a better understanding of the various issues at stake when developing the trans-European networks. Challenges are manifold, but stimulating the growth of inland waterways in an environmentally sound way is a clear answer to diversify the transport potential in Europe.

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