



**Press Release
Luxembourg, 3 March 2015**

River and canal bottlenecks hinder shift of freight traffic from roads to inland waterways

A report published today by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) has found that EU-funded efforts to shift freight traffic in Europe from roads to inland waterway transport have made slow progress in the last 15 years. EU auditors say that projects co-funded by the EU as part of a strategy to increase the use of inland waterways have not been implemented effectively. Inland waterway transport has made no gains as an alternative to road transport and navigability has not improved.

“A single cargo vessel on a river can replace hundreds of trucks on the road and therefore reduce congestion, pollution and accidents in the whole EU. Shifting freight traffic from roads to the network of rivers and canals can be beneficial to all EU citizens. However, more than a decade after the EU declared it a priority, development of this mode of transport lags behind road and rail,” said Iliana Ivanova, the ECA Member responsible for the report. “A connected Europe with a sustainable transport strategy requires greater effort by the EU to improve its waterways and create a more balanced share of options across road, rail and water.”

The low impact of EU funding on river and canal transport in Europe comes as a result of the failure to eliminate bottlenecks – a key requisite of the EU’s strategies for developing inland waterway transport. These bottlenecks include bridges which are not high enough, inefficient locks and stretches of water which are not wide enough for traffic volumes.

Member States have paid little attention to inland waterways, in spite of the Commission making them a priority as far back as 2001 in order to shift traffic away from roads to more environmentally friendly modes of transport. The cost of eliminating all bottlenecks within the Trans-European Network exceeds by far the funding available from the EU budget. To address this gap, there is a need for additional funding from national and/or private sources. The auditors also found that there was no coherent overall strategy between Member States connected by main water corridors and that the EU strategies gave insufficient attention to river maintenance and political and environmental considerations.

To **improve the effectiveness of EU funding** of inland waterway transport, the **auditors recommend** that:

- Member States prioritise inland waterway projects with the greatest and most immediate benefits;
- the Commission focus its funding on projects with advanced plans to eliminate bottlenecks.

To **improve coordination between Member States**, the Commission should:

- rigorously analyse the potential market and benefits of inland navigation on different river segments and coordinate across Member States the implementation of core TEN-T network;
- agree specific and achievable objectives with Member States to eliminate bottlenecks;
- strengthen the legal base in order to broaden the reporting requirements in relation to the navigation status of the waterways and to require Member States to elaborate national inland waterway maintenance plans in a coordinated way.

The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors. The full report is available at www.eca.europa.eu

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Notes to editors

Half of Europe's population lives close to the coast or to inland waterways and most European industrial centres can be reached by inland navigation. Inland waterway transport is, together with road and rail transport, one of the main three land transport modes. Goods are transported with ships via canals, rivers and lakes, between inland ports and wharfs. Inland navigation vessels have a loading capacity that is equivalent to hundreds of trucks. They can bring potential benefits in terms of cost savings, reduced pollution and increased transport safety.

This special report (1/2015) entitled "**Inland Waterway Transport in Europe: No significant improvements in modal share and navigability conditions since 2001**" examines whether the inland waterway freight transport strategies have been implemented effectively by the Commission and the Member States. The auditors assessed whether the projects co-funded by the EU budget contributed effectively to increasing the modal share of inland waterway freight transport and improving navigability conditions and whether the EU inland waterway transport strategies were coherent and based on relevant and comprehensive analyses.

The audit encompassed a review of the policy and strategy papers from 2001 onwards and included on-site verification of the achievements of 12 projects co-financed by the Structural Funds and the Trans-European Network for Transport budget in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany and Hungary, accounting for almost 90 % of expenditure for inland waterway infrastructure that was likely to be completed by 2013.

The EU's inland waterway transport projects received 1 278 million euros in funding in the 2007-2013 period under the Trans-European Transport (TEN-T) instrument, the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund.

ECA special reports are published throughout the year, presenting the findings of selected audits of specific EU budgetary areas or management topics.