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Future perspective of integrated waterway transport in Europe and the Joint Statement.

I am very pleased to witness the presentations about the Joint Statement Principle Guidelines.

When the process started three years ago, due to the engagement of the three Commissions, ICPDR, Sava and Danube Commissions, but also with a convinced and factual support of the European Commission, I am sure that many people thought: "This will remain a noble initiative where transport operators and environmental groups will debate endlessly without reaching any concrete result."

Today we are here to testify that the vision of a common approach is not only possible but is generating useful tools to combine an efficient and sustainable inland waterways transport system to the protection of inestimable environmental habitat along the Danube river.

I believe that we all have to remember that a good water transport system is good for the environment, too.

The frequently heard leit-motiv that development growth is only achieved through the sacrifice of environment, has to be reversed: only an efficient, effective and finally sustainable transport system presents a minimal impact on the river habitat, while attaining the economical growth of the local communities.

The Danube is such a beautiful river; I had the opportunity of visiting many different sections, from the Bavarian one in Straubing, to the Wachau and the National Park in Austria, from the Gabčíkovo to the Romanian section of Calarasi. Everywhere the Danube is a majestic river with almost no ships, mainly a few for tourism, less for freight transportation.

Denying to develop part of the unexploited shipping capacity on the Danube would mean giving up the possibility to achieve the economical growth that many regions along the river are awaiting and looking for.

Here stems the remarkable result achieved with the Joint Statement Guidelines: transport and growth must take into account the importance and the richness that Danube river habitats represent, and a good inland transport system is the one that, from the beginning, searches for the optimal solutions.

At the same time it is important to keep into account the basic rules of transport: a transport mode becomes attractive if it can provide efficient and sustainable conditions, including the economical viability and the market requests' satisfaction.

In other words it does not make sense to build an inland waterways transport system that cannot compete with the other modes of transport, but if we do not pursue its development then road transportation particularly will be wildly exploited at the detriment of the overall ecology of the region.

I do not expect that all problems have been solved with the achievement of the guidelines, certainly not. The good will demonstrated by all stakeholders in developing these lines has now to be demonstrated in the effective cooperation during the implementation of infrastructural projects. A practical result is essential for a sound development of regions.

Good legislation is already available, what is needed is that the economical rules and the environmental ones go hand in hand always looking for the optimal solution.

The application of Guidelines as they were agreed requires the flexibility from both sides to accept that nothing will change abruptly, things have to be digested, mutual consideration has to be set up, as it has been demonstrated during these last three years of cooperation and confrontation at the same time.

Looking back and thinking how many times consolidated and short sighted positions have hampered the possibility of achieving commonly agreed results, I am quite satisfied that the Guidelines of the Joint Statement are now a reality and that, sometimes through difficulties, the Joint Statement has been taken on-board by competent authorities.

Romania, Hungary and Germany, have already accepted to insert the Joint Statement principle in the implementation of infrastructural works on the river. If there are still misunderstandings or unresolved disputes, it has also to be highlighted that a long way has been gone in merely three years.

Looking at the newly launched European Commissions Danube Region Strategy, the achievement of today opens the possibility to an environmentally respectful development of the inland freight navigation that is so much needed in the river basin.

The Danube Macroregion Strategy calls for the integration of all modes of transport, including road, rail, air, sea and inland waterways. In this scenario, inland waterways transport plays a central role, which is the same since ancient times: the Danube represents the back bone connecting all regions and, through an appropriate development of intermodal ports, the crossing point to reach internal regions.