

Well, Mrs. Nagtegaal, many thanks for the opportunity and your introduction.

First of all, for the ones who do not know our business association, let me shortly introduce who we are and what we do.

Pro Danube International is a non-profit business association, established more than 10 years ago.

„It is our believe that the potential of the Danube waterway, as a competitive logistics system, is by far bigger as we use it today. And to unlock this potential is our vision. This goes for passenger as well as for cargo transportation.“

Today we are a network of about 180 companies, who actively participate in making our vision becoming a reality.

In a nutshell, we are much more then just a business-association, as we also initiate and execute projects, on European level, such as the DANTE, DAPhNE, GRENDL and the LNG Masterplan.

All right, as you said, let us dive a bit deeper into the Danube.

First of all, the Danube is 3x as long as the Rhine, so about 2.400 km and crossing 10 countries, some EU, some non-EU Member States – in other words, it is the country richest river in the world.

And it connects additionally, through the Main-Danube channel with other regions in the Rhine area -up to the North Sea.

But what are the basic pre-requisites for a competitive Danube waterborne transportation – and to support the NAIADES III - strategy?

- First and most important - efficient waterway infrastructure and maintenance
- Secondly - high performing ports – serving as regional economic hubs – and enabling the integration of inland waterway transportation into multimodal logistic supply chains
- Then we need - environmentally friendly and modern inland vessels – our biggest challenge today
- and – last but not least – we have to get better to make use of digital services.

Let's look now into the navigability & fairway maintenance

Looking at the Danube, then we can say, that in the last years, and specially with the help of projects like the “Fairway Danube”, we could reduce the bottlenecks along the Danube significantly.

There are areas where navigability has been increased significantly which is a great gain for the sector when it comes to planning and the quality of the services.

It does not only increase the sectors' reliability and resilience – but also decreases the emissions, while raising transport efficiency.

However, we still have, or better to say, remain with about 5-6 real bottlenecks e.g. in Austria, in Hungary and the worst one – when sailing from or to the Black Sea - the common Romanian-Bulgarian section – which is currently the decisive factor.

To overcome these last limitations in the fairway, we – as Pro Danube International - proposed to the Commission - that the **IWT-sector**, together **with the waterway administrations** should **join the forces** and regularly and proactively, come together, and prepare a set of measures to maintain a Good Navigation Status.

In this sense, we believe, when the key experts, the best of the best people, come together and take joint decisions, that also the last bottlenecks can be eliminated in the near future.

As next, lets stock-take on Inland ports

Inland ports, as we all know, play an essential role in trade and logistics.

Danube ports have the potential to act as engines of growth in their host cities and regions and being energy hubs and serve as an interface between various transport modes.

Not only capitals of countries, like Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest and Belgrade being situated directly on the Danube.

There are also a numerous of key production and industrial sites directly located along the Danube Corridor. This are major European producers of steel, fertilizers and processing companies for agricultural products.

Many of those ports offer already today - sustainable solutions and attracting key industrial players.

Also, many of those ports offer already today – shore electricity to vessel – and reducing the emission footprint of the sector.

And many of those ports invested heavily in green-energy solutions, from windmills to giant photovoltaic installations – and – started to change in the recent months / years - to electrify cranes and ports.

So, this is a great step forward in the last years.

Generally speaking, Danube ports understand their very important role in the logistics industry.

But, as we say at Pro Danube International, there is still some room to improve.

Like, less rigid regulatory barriers and obstacles for the creation of just-in-time synchromodal logistics solutions, then a higher level of automatization and last but not least flexible (as we call it) **Port Services On Demand** – services in the ports, which are available 24 hours – 7 days a week, like at train stations – or airports.

Well, and then we have a clear West-East decline - and lacking these high standards - in some regions on the lower Danube.

Especially, when it comes to multi-modal solutions.

We need **multi-modal solutions** to reach the NAIADES III targets – and this is where we have to focus in the future – being ready for multi-modal services in the lower Danube section.

And now - let's face our biggest challenge - the decarbonization, greening and digitalisation I try to do it in a nutshell, the sector is being faced with a decarbonization challenge. What we can say on behalf of our members – is – that we are truly committed to decarbonize the sector.

And from our side we can also report that there are several initiatives tackling the challenge of decarbonization.

Recently there are special pushers, vessels and barges for low water navigation, but also new engines – Stage V level - and technologies planned, currently build or even already deployed.

On the other hand, we get more and more public mooring places equipped with shore-power-electricity.

All in all - great steps forward in our transition to coop and facilitate lower emissions and to decarbonize the sector.

Coming back to the greatest challenge we face – the future source of energy.  
As of today, we also know, that **there will be no “one solution fits all”**.

We can imagine, that for port pushers or vessel with limited radius of sailing, the sector will use battery packs or hydrogen as a source of energy.

But for long distance voyages, as I mentioned earlier, sailing for 2.000 or more kilometers, and sailing even between the Black Sea and the North Sea, as it is done today, this will not be an option.

What we face in the moment, and this goes for the Rhine, Elbe and Danube, is, that we have to align all our efforts, especially on these interconnected waterways, to agree on the future energy source for the sector.

Whatever the energy source will be, one thing is clear - **it must be available along all routes**.  
It would make no sense to use one source of energy on the Rhine and another one on the Danube.

Customers of the sector, like steel manufacturers, fertilizer producers and the supply chain of agricultural products, rely on the waterborne transportation services across those rivers and between the regions.

And the same goes of course also for the tourism – the vessel cruising - sector.

This is a responsibility we have and therefore, we must ensure a coordinated, common approach between the regions.

One last topic - where we – the sector - has to work on – is the digital transformation. River Information Services and data (thanks to projects like the RIS COMEX) enable today waterway transport and logistics users to properly calculate routes and voyages.

– but it enables us also - to lift documentation hurdles and remove administrative barriers.

And this is where Pro Danube International says - **“Same River – Same Rules”**  
- no need anymore - for handwritten papers at border crossing and controls.  
Let’s re-use available data in the system, save time and money for the operators.

**And money is the key word for my closing.**

Let me have a few thoughts on your proposed dedicated IWT Fund.

As you mentioned in your report, it is very difficult for ship-owners to have access to loans in order to finance the energy transition - due to the lack of a positive business case.

This goes for the Rhine countries, and I can confirm, that the same is valid for the Danube region.

This is in full correlation with what we observe as a business association together with our members and the market.

In this respect, we would like to point – to the - importance of a European coordinated – cross regions and waterways – simplified and easy to access - support instrument.

Independently of its setup, it should ensure same access for all market participants.

In this sense, and at the end of my speech, we would like to take this opportunity and thank you personally - for your initiative and the efforts you put into our sector.

Thank you for your dedication to the sector.

Well and now let’s hear a bit more from the cargo sector.