Photo: EMMA project

More cooperation needed

by Laura Normio, *Communication Manager of EMMA*

The potential of inland waterway transport is not yet fully used despite the benefits it carries. Better integration with the multimodal logistic chains across the Baltic Sea region (BSR) requires both European cooperation, and a change in mindset regarding policy and industry.

Inland navigation has a lot of potential, even though the geographical and administrative conditions differ from country to country. This transport mode is efficient, reliable, safe, and environmentally-friendly, especially when taking into consideration the EU's climate policy goals on CO_2 emission reduction, and the increasing traffic volumes confronted with capacity restrictions of road and rail infrastructure. Simply speaking, moving freight from road to waterways is indispensable.

The annual tonnage transported via inland waterways in 2014 is 228 mln in Germany, 5.0 mln in Poland, 4.0 mln in Finland, and over 1.0 mln in Lithuania.

Coexistence with other transport modes

Some important steps have already been taken in promoting inland waterway transport, such as creating the EU waterway transport action plan NAIADES. Rivers are already integrated within the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T), but an appropriate financial framework to support the role of ports in TEN-T is nonetheless required from the EU.

An inland navigation layer should be seen as combined with seaports, inland ports, railways, motorways, and logistic centres. Unfortunately, it still plays an insufficient role in the transport system in the BSR as well. The exception that proves the rule is the Rhine Corridor that is even called the motorway of inland navigation. "Bulk transport dominates inland waterway transport. The fast-growing container segment has only reached Germany and its neighbours along the Rhine," Gunnar Platz, CEO of PLANCO Consulting and Project Manager of Interreg Baltic Sea Region project EMMA, said.

The current status of inland shipping is varied. While Poland and Germany have a dense waterway network (though the

Panellists in the EMMA annual conference in Warsaw. From the left: Gunnar Platz, Jukka Hasu, Roland Hörner, Sławomir Kopyść, Karin de Schepper and Stefan Breitenbach

former in a run-down state), in Finland and Lithuania it is only concentrated in a few regions. The annual tonnage transported via inland waterways in 2014 is 228 mln in Germany, 5.0 mln in Poland, 4.0 mln in Finland, and over 1.0 mln in Lithuania. Gunnar provides one explanation for this: "Practical knowledge amongst shippers is limited, and most shippers assume that organising an intermodal transport chain including inland water transport is complicated. Administrative barriers hinder the development of ports, waterways and ships. Political support could be stronger, since lobbying is not as strong as for road and rail."

Strong voice from EMMA

The EU aims at shifting 30% of long-distance freight traffic from road to rail and inland waterways, as well as to having carbon-free city logistics by 2030. Since road and rail infrastructure in some parts of the BSR is overloaded, inland waterway transport with its huge potential offers many actors an opportunity for sustainable growth. Bearing this in mind, an international group consisting of regional and national transport politicians, ports, shippers, lobby organisations and industry representatives initiated the Interreg Baltic Sea Region project EMMA which plans to introduce a change and enhance inland navigation in the BSR. The "EMMA project aims at improving the competitiveness, reducing bureaucratic and regulatory barriers, raising awareness, and giving inland water transport a better standing in policy and society," Stefan Breitenbach, Head of Project Department at the Port of Hamburg Marketing, which is the Lead Partner of EMMA, summarized. His voice was recently supported by the EU appointment of EMMA as a flagship project in the Policy Area Transport.

EMMA brings together lobby organisations and short sea shipping promotion centres to exchange knowledge and to join forces for a stronger voice. These activities lead to recommendations for strengthening of sector organisations including their financial conditions. EMMA analyses where insufficient administrative structures (like different responsibilities for transport and logistics) hinder the development, and gives recommendations for improvements.

"There is clearly a need for cooperation and harmonization that the EMMA project can support. Most importantly, EMMA brings together different stakeholders having a role by organising regular roundtable meetings, so the people active in the sector talk to each other," Adina Cailliaux, Senior Project Manager at the Port of Hamburg Marketing, added.

Innovative pilots under way

EMMA is focused on developing and implementing innovative pilot solutions. During the three-year-long project, partners will together develop efficient transport solutions in order to assure cross-region applicability and benefits. EMMA will improve transport management on inland waterways in the BSR with the development of an IT prototype that provides information relevant to the planning and operations, for example, on the River Elbe.

"By combining available data sources such as river information services (RIS) with other information necessary for planning, the map-based web application provides benefits especially for shippers, transport organisers, vessel owners and skippers," Arne Gehlhaar, Project Manager at the Institute of Shipping Economics and Logistics, commented.

Photos: S. Werner/EMMA project

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In Finland, in the Lake Saimaa area, steps towards an intelligent RIS system will be taken as well, based on experiences of existing RIS systems and local needs while in Lithuania, EMMA partners will analyse conditions and prerequisites for more intensive use of inland shipping for oversized cargo, as it can be a reliable and efficient solution for this type of freight.

Polish EMMA partners are demonstrating that barge transport is possible even with the current unfavourable navigation conditions: "A cruise from Gdańsk towards Warsaw with a container barge shall prove this. The project will also show the transport potential of the river and the regions bordering the Vistula," Rafal Modrzewski, Head of the European Territorial Cooperation Division at the Marshal's Office of Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, said. Another possibility to strengthen inland waterway transport is to bring the industry closer to the water, but this requires sufficient multimodal ports. In Poland, the best location for such a port will be investigated near Bydgoszcz, in the hinterland of the Port of Gdańsk.

In Sweden, like in other Nordic countries, geographic conditions are different from those in the Central Europe. "The waterways to be used are larger lakes, where water depth and bridges do not restrict the transport. In contrast to many other regions, here the height of waves and ice are more relevant. This makes it challenging to use existing barge types with common European standards," Johan Lantz, CEO of Avatar Logistics AB, explained. Consequently, Swedish EMMA partners intend to develop a concept to adjust European barges to the conditions of the Nordic countries. It will be achieved by close cooperation with the Swedish shipping company Avatar Logistics AB, and accompanied by European actors in ship construction, inland waterway barging, and classification societies.

More than 50 organisations are supporting EMMA to bring the project to success. Once the changes are implemented in the Baltic Sea region, they could also be adopted in other European countries. ■

ENHANCING INLAND NAVIGATION EMMA

EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION FLAGSHIP