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Statement by Switzerland

**History and Role of the Central Commission for the Navigation on
the Rhine (CCNR)**

Switzerland had the presidency of the Central Commission for the Navigation on the Rhine in 2006/7 and would therefore like to highlight some aspects of this important European body which has played and still plays a pivotal role in European inland waterway navigation.

The foundation of the CCNR dates back to the Vienna Congress of 1815 when the countries adjacent to the Rhine decided at a diplomatic Conference upon the creation of a Commission. In August 1816 the Commission had its first session in Mainz/Germany. The most prominent event was the signature of the Mannheim Act in 1868 which is still in force today and constitutes the eldest multilateral international treaty in Europe. In 1920 the Commission was transferred to Strasbourg and a permanent Secretariat was installed.

Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland are members of the CCNR. Each member country delegates four commissioners and two deputy commissioners. They meet twice a year in plenary sessions. In addition there are various technical committees which are usually attended by experts. Decisions and resolutions are taken by consensus. The Chairmanship rotates and changes every two years. The fundamental principles of the Mannheim Treaty comprise the free and equal passage on the Rhine river and the principle that no general taxes must be imposed for ships using the waterway. Moreover the member countries are obliged to keep the river clean (a respective convention is about to enter into force) and there is a common jurisdiction for conflicts resulting from Rhine navigation. In recent years the focus has shifted to environmental protection and hence the relevant committees have undergone a boost.

In May 2006 the CCNR had its first ministerial Meeting in Basel under the Chairmanship of Switzerland. The so called "Basel Declaration" stresses the commitment of the member States to the Mannheim Act and the CCNR and reconfirms its principles, recognizes the importance of the Rhine navigation and its model role for all European inland waterways navigation. Furthermore it underlines the dedication of the Member States to intensify the cooperation between the CCNR and the other actors in this field, in particular the European Union and to contribute substantially to the NAIADES initiative. The Member States also highlight the aim to reduce exhaust fumes and toxic wastes of ships and they commit themselves to improving the conditions for the professions in Rhine navigation. Furthermore they urge the CCNR to improve her legal system by examining the existing rules and adapting them where necessary.

The biennium 2006/07 was marked by an intensive discussion about the future of the CCNR. In essence there was the question of the CCNR's role in the context of a global European inland waterway navigation policy. New ideas were launched and the question was raised whether the competences of various instances such as the CCNR, the Danube Commission, the ECE/UNO and the European Commission should be moulded into one single institution. A group of independent experts under the name of EFIN was established in view of the NAIADES programme. The deliberations of the expert group resulted in the maintenance of the existing framework and at the same time the call for improving the cooperation between the different actors. This position was eventually shared by the European and the Danube Commissions. In fact the rules and regulations of the CCNR have influenced those of other international bodies in this field for many years. The 2006/07 biennium has been pivotal in the role of the CCNR. A joint Working Group of the CCNR and the EC on technical rules for ships in inland waterways succeeded in elaborating rules which should allow for uniform European ship certificates. The legal framework for the transport of dangerous goods is about to be revised in a common effort of the CCNR, the EC and the ECE/UNO and should lead to the adoption of a joint decision in the course of this year.

As mentioned before the dimension of the ecological protection of European inland waterways is another topic which has been highlighted and addressed by the CCNR. Additional criteria were prepared regarding

toxic substances for the health and the aquatic environment. As in the maritime navigation the question of double-hull tankers was taken up. Moreover rules regarding the exhaust fumes of ships' engines were coordinated with the other actors.

At the Bucarest Conference of September 2006 the relationship between the CCNR and the Danube Commission was addressed in a common declaration which forms the basis for an intensified cooperation between the two partners. This cooperation should include, among other topics, a subsequent convergence of anti-pollution measures.

The Central Commission for the Navigation on the Rhine remains an important pillar of European inland waterway navigation and has set many precedents in this field. Switzerland is committed to its strength and has always encouraged improved cooperation with the other actors active in European inland waterway navigation. The aim must be a further convergence of rules and especially also a uniform implementation of the existing legal and technical framework. This can best be achieved by further strengthening the cooperation between the relevant inter-European institutions and thus creating an interlocked framework covering the whole range of issues of European inland waterway navigation.

Thank you Mr Chairman.