

AUTUMN PLENARY SESSION 2023

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On 6 December 2023, the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR) held its autumn plenary session. Mr Diégo Colas, head of the French delegation, chaired the meeting. In January 2024, the rotating Presidency will pass to Mr Michiel van Kruiningen, head of the Dutch delegation, for a period of two years.

At the plenary meeting, a number of resolutions were adopted, relating to automated navigation and remote operation, technical requirements for vessels, police regulations, Rhine navigation personnel, matters concerning the Rhine waterway and the economic situation of inland navigation in Europe.

OVERVIEW OF THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY OF THE CCNR

The change of rotating Presidency at the end of the year offered the ideal opportunity to review the highlights of the period 2022-2023.

Mr Diégo Colas began by praising the excellent cooperative relationship with the EU, best illustrated by the adoption of new Regulations for Rhine navigation personnel ([RPN](#)), the updating of the [CESNI](#) standards and the participation in the PLATINA3 project.

The inland navigation energy transition also formed the core of the work of the CCNR. On the basis of the [roadmap adopted by the CCNR for reducing emissions](#), significant progress has been achieved over the last two years. Recommendations for derogations for ten innovative vessels using a very wide range of technologies – hydrogen, methanol, interchangeable battery containers and even compressed natural gas – have also been approved by the CCNR. In the field of digitisation, the French Presidency was committed to enabling the development of a number of services. The updated version of the Police regulations for the navigation of the Rhine ([RPR](#)) now permits a number of documents to be presented to the police in electronic format, such as the Rhine certificate. Similarly, the deployment of river information services is continuing on the Rhine, with the extension of the electronic reporting requirement.

In the field of [automation and remote operation](#), the CCNR has also demonstrated its capacity for innovation. It has adopted a framework setting out the possible derogations from CCNR regulations. This allowed the first recommendations on the conduct of pilot projects linked to automation and remote operation to be adopted by the CCNR. In addition, a new edition of the international definition of levels of automation was adopted in 2022.

Finally, the improvement of berths on the Upper Rhine was a priority for the French



Presidency. VNF has launched studies in conjunction with EDF to examine the construction of moorings for cargo vessels, with a view to improving the current situation on the Upper Rhine. The CCNR also held a workshop in March 2022 on "[Shore power at berths](#)". Here the CCNR again proved its role as a discussion forum capable of bringing together all available expertise.

PRIORITIES FOR THE DUTCH PRESIDENCY OF THE CCNR

The future Dutch Presidency presented its aims and priorities for the next two years. Strengthening cooperation with the EU, the sustainable development of inland navigation, adapting to climate change, smart shipping and the long-term transitional provisions for technical specifications for vessels will make up the key topics for the CCNR in 2024-2025. A dedicated press release will be issued in January 2024.

AUTOMATED NAVIGATION AND REMOTE OPERATION

In order to support the development of automated navigation or remote operation, the CCNR adopted three recommendations for Phase 2 of the following pilot projects:

- the pushed convoy PRIVILEGE;
- the motor vessel PERSEVERANCE;
- the pushed convoy REINHOLD DEYMANN.

During Phase 2 of these projects, and at certain points, the vessel or the pushed convoys will be operated remotely by an operator in a remote operation centre (ROC). Nevertheless, the ultimate responsibility remains with the boatmaster on board, who can intervene at any time. As a result, this Phase 2 makes it necessary to derogate from certain provisions of the RPR and the [RVIR](#) (in particular the [ES-TRIN](#)), even if there is a minimum crew on board. The installation of additional equipment on the pushed convoys and the vessel, the information available to the operator in the ROC and the minimum crew on board make it possible to guarantee a level of safety

equivalent to that of «conventional» navigation. The recommendations specify that the initial results should be transmitted to the CCNR through regular evaluation reports. The Central Commission also intends to draw on the experience gained from the pilot projects when examining requests for recommendations for Phase 3 of these projects, in which there will be a reduced crew on board.

These recommendations are a first for the Rhine. They are a concrete example of the CCNR's support for innovation and the development of automated navigation and remote operation.

ENERGY TRANSITION

The CCNR has decided to publish the recommendations for derogations to the Rhine vessel inspection regulations (RVIR) allowing the operation of eight innovative vessels on the Rhine and the inland waterways of the EU:

- five hydrogen-powered vessels: Antonie, Ab Initio, Zulu 6, Rhenus Mannheim I and FPS Waal;
- one methanol-powered vessel: Stolt IJssel;
- two vessels using fibre-reinforced synthetic material: Aqua Sapphire and Aqua Beryl.



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These pilot projects for inland navigation vessels are essential to the development and introduction of technological innovations, and contribute to the regulatory work. Through its concrete actions, the CCNR is yet again demonstrating its strong support for innovation and is helping inland navigation companies to meet the challenges of climate change.

CONTINUOUS ADAPTING OF POLICE REGULATIONS

Several amendments to the Police Regulations for the Navigation of the Rhine (RPR) were adopted during the autumn plenary session. One concerns the position of side lights on a pushed convoy under way. The change, proposed by the sector, is intended to place the side lights as far to the stern as possible, on the widest part of the pushed convoy, so that the total length of the convoy is clearly visible (especially at night). The aim of the amendment is to contribute to increasing the safety of navigation on the Rhine and improving the smooth flow of traffic, in particular by making certain manoeuvres safer.

Another amendment adopted concerns the updating of Annex 13 of the RPR, which contains an exhaustive list of the on-board certificates and documents, in order to take account of the new [SPE-CDNI](#) electronic payment system. In practice, this means allowing receipts for the supply of diesel and waste disposal fees to be submitted electronically (in pdf format). This change represents a further step in the digitisation of inland navigation and will make life easier for boatmasters.

These amendments will enter into force on 1 December 2024.

SIMPLIFIED APPLICATION OF THE RPN

Article 1.04 of the RPN has been amended and will allow the publication of lists and tables for the application of the RPN. A first edition of these lists and tables will be published before the end of the year and will replace the old "service instructions". This simplified overview will provide useful information for both crew and the competent authorities. They will be able to find the data required for the new training courses, the approved institutes and also the approved doctors. Holders of certificates of qualification issued under the RPN will be able to consult one of the doctors listed when renewing their certificate. This is a very tangible benefit of the close cooperation between CCNR Member States. With everything now concentrated in a single document, users have access to an equivalent level of information on specific aspects of the RPN.

MATTERS RELATING TO THE RHINE WATERWAY

The CCNR has approved various construction projects on the Rhine, including:

- the placement of five dolphins providing moorings for vessels in the downstream and upstream garages of the Rhinau lock;
- the construction of a water intake facility to fill the residual basins of the Garzweiler II and Hambach open-cast lignite mines, near Dormagen;
- annual maintenance work on the lock-dam complexes on the Nederrijn and the Lek (Driel, Amerongen and Hagestein).

None of this work on the waterway will constitute an obstacle to navigation on the Rhine.

In addition, the CCNR has approved the occasional closure of various lock chambers on the Upper Rhine to allow maintenance work to take place.

THE ECONOMIC SITUATION FOR INLAND NAVIGATION IN EUROPE

During the first half of 2023, economic conditions were in a slowdown phase. High interest rates had a negative impact on households' purchasing power. For Rhine traffic this meant a reduction in cargo traffic during the first six months of 2023, amounting to a fall of 10.8% for all goods transported along the whole length of the Rhine. The information currently available is that the world economy will not recover until 2024, meaning that there is no prospect of any significant improvement in the economy in the second half of 2023.

Oil and fuel prices have started to fall again, having peaked in mid-2022. Current information suggests that the price of inland navigation fuel is likely to be around 80 Euros per 100 litres in 2023 and 2024. However, political developments, in particular regarding the war in Ukraine, will determine the price of fuel in the future. In the first half of 2023, the trend in freight rates was still marked by the low levels of the previous year. Finally, since the second half of 2021, passenger transport has returned to its pre-pandemic level and this recovery looks set to continue.

The CCNR's annual, biannual and thematic reports are available online at <https://inland-navigation-market.org/>.

NEXT PLENARY SESSION

The next plenary session of the CCNR will be held in Strasbourg, on 13 June 2024.

From mid-January 2024, all the resolutions adopted at the plenary session will be available on the CCNR website at: <https://www.ccr-zkr.org/13020400-en.html>.



ABOUT THE CCNR

The Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR) is an international organisation that exercises an essential regulatory role in the navigation of the Rhine. It is active in the technical, legal, economic and environmental fields. In all its areas of action, its work is guided by the efficiency of transport on the Rhine, safety, social considerations, and respect for the environment. Many of the CCNR's activities now reach beyond the Rhine and are directly concerned with European navigable waterways more generally. The CCNR works closely with the European Commission as well as with the other river commissions and international organisations.



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