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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you here in Rotterdam. Today, we celebrate a milestone: 10 years of CESNI. But as we mark this achievement, let us remember that the ideas behind CESNI reach much further back in time.

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Let me take you back to Rotterdam in 1968. The occasion? The centenary of the Mannheim Act. The speaker? Dutch Foreign Minister Joseph Luns. In his speech to the business community, Luns spoke of the exceptional importance of the CCNR—not only for the development of the European economy but also for European integration. He urged the then still young EEC to learn from the CCNR's experience, without dogmatic bias regarding the legal and economic structure of the Rhine regime.

This was a call for pragmatic cooperation. Luns did not live to see it, but 47 years later, the European Committee for drawing up Standards in the field of inland navigation, CESNI, was born—right here in Rotterdam. And now we are back to celebrate CESNI's successes.

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Much preceded CESNI's founding. In the late 1990s, initial discussions on concrete cooperation between the CCNR and the EC began. This led to the first cooperation agreement, merely focused on information exchange. In 2006, the Joint Working Group (JWG) was established to harmonise EU- and Rhine Regulation in the field of technical requirements, thus enabling mutual recognition of certificates.

But the need for deeper cooperation was clear. An administrative arrangement was signed, paving the way for CESNI. CESNI was tasked with

elaborating standards for inland navigation. In doing so, it fulfilled the pragmatic vision that Luns had once championed.

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Of course, the journey was not without doubts. Not all member states were convinced. But CESNI found its way—with rotating chairmanship, balanced participation, and a clear focus on three fields of interest: technical requirements (PT), professional qualifications (QP), and in 2018, when the time had come, information technologies (TI).

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So, what makes CESNI a success?

- First, the broad extent of cooperation. So many public and private parties working together to build a harmonised framework of standards for inland waterway transport (IWT). CESNI brings together all of Europe's expertise. With the support of a professional secretariat, they work on appropriate and up-to-date standards.
- Second, the pragmatic approach and a clear focus. By its technical standards as a base for harmonisation, CESNI avoids institutional gridlock. Legal debates give way to content-driven collaboration. The sector is evolving—towards sustainability, digitalisation, automation, and new markets, while keeping high safety standards. CESNI provides the clarity and structure needed to navigate this transition. Its standards are made binding by the CCNR and EU-regulation, and recommended by the Danube Commission and UN/ECE—giving them pan-European reach.
- Third, the human factor. CESNI is a network of experts who know each other well. The inland navigation world is small—you keep bumping into familiar faces. Working together with people you know well, makes you achieve more.

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But where do we go from here?

New topics will emerge. The example of the integration of the RIS-requirements in the CESNI portfolio has shown that CESNI can successfully address new topics. We are witnessing that this is again working for the eTools, an important field of digitalisation. And we can be confident that it will work in the field of automation too.

Inland shipping is in transition. Fast technical developments demand standards that set the safety objectives while leaving room for different technical solutions.

Personally, I have always been in favour of replacing means-based standards as much as possible with goal-based standards, as they leave more room for innovation. At the same time, a description of an accepted technical solution could facilitate implementation. The challenge is to simplify rules while maintaining clarity.

New tasks? Perhaps. CESNI's strength lies in standard-setting and harmonised implementation. I would like to recall that upon proposal of the CCNR, CESNI included work on remotely operated vessels in the latest work programme, with the will to learn from currently gained experience in automation all over Europe. This is why I think that for derogations, CESNI could play a stronger role. Faster procedures are needed to support innovation. The CCNR can act swiftly within its own legal framework—CESNI could be empowered to do the same on a European level.

Yet, I caution against expanding CESNI's mandate too broadly. Its effectiveness lies in its focus. And, although new topics for standardization can be envisaged, I am more reluctant about strategy and policy support. Let CESNI do what it does best: harmonise standards and coordinate their implementation.

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And what of governance?

At first glance, IWT governance seems quite fragmented. And although CESNI has brought harmonisation, one could also argue for simplification. But, the structure we have today offers something incredibly valuable: flexibility. It allows us to tackle challenges at the level where they're best addressed.

While the European scale gives us general frameworks, it may miss the local nuance. And the national scale? It can be too narrow, especially for cross-border issues like inland waterway transport. That's where river commissions come in to bridge the gap.

When for example we talk about climate adaptation or maintaining navigability, we talk about tangible challenges that demand specific knowledge of the waterways themselves. River commissions are uniquely positioned to deliver that.

Now, there's a last point I want to raise.

We often treat inland navigation policy as just one branch of transport policy. But let's not forget—it has many intersections with water management. Together we must find balanced solutions, with respect of all interests. The real challenge ahead is an integrated approach of the issues we face.

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These themes will be explored further in today's presentations. But for now, let us take a moment to appreciate how far we've come. Let us continue to build on this legacy—with pragmatism, cooperation, and a shared commitment to progress.

I wish you all a pleasant and inspiring morning.

Thank you.