

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning a European rail network for competitive freight

1. Welcome
2. Let me to take this opportunity to say few words on behalf of the Czech Presidency about the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning a European rail network for competitive freight
3. One of the horizontal priorities of Czech Presidency is the competitiveness of EU transport systems, and therefore we take this proposal as one of the priority dossiers.
4. CZPRES welcomes this initiative of the Commission and can see this as an opportunity to give the rail freight transport an impulse to become more competitive especially in comparison to other transport modes, especially road transport. At the moment we are at the stage of negotiations at the Council working group and we are hoping to reach a political agreement at the Council meeting in June
5. We can see this in a way as extending some of the principles of railway interoperability into other areas of organizing railway transport and infrastructure, where there is an added value associated with common European measures and cooperation along the rail freight corridors. Indeed action already has been taken to remove technical barriers and to improve market access, but there are still many aspects that have not been dealt with and which remain a problem hindering the development of rail freight. Some of them can only be dealt with on a geographically specific basis and that is why we think the corridor approach is a good one in this case. An example is investment into railway infrastructure and capacity allocation coordination, but obstacles might often be much simpler and relatively easy to overcome, such as language barrier in providing information to railway undertakings for example. Although there have been voices criticizing the creation of yet another system of corridors, given we already have RNE, ERTMS corridors, TEN-T network etc in place. However the principle of the proposal is to build on these initiatives and broaden them in order to find a way to cooperate on a wider range of aspects and also to provide a common framework for such actions.
6. The Czech republic has already taken a similar initiative by choosing to promote a freight corridor from Czech Republic to the Netherlands. From this experience we can see that a cooperation on an international level is needed and therefore we can only be in favor of the proposal subject to certain amendments.

7. The proposal has been criticized for being too bureaucratic and rigid in some aspects but we as the CZPRES can see good potential in the proposal especially after some changes to the text in the context of discussion at the Council working group, which is well under way.
8. The role of the CZPRES as we see it is to keep the good ideas from the Commission proposal and together with the other Member States make sure that it is politically acceptable for all and that it takes account of not only the general interest which of course the Commission represents, but also to make sure any national specific conditions are also taken into account.
9. We are confident that we can reach an agreement and by bringing this legal text to life improve the conditions for rail freight transport in Europe.
10. Although of course a legislative action can only be an impulse here and we can not have a real action and improvement without the stakeholders actually willing to take steps in order to improve the situation. Therefore we feel a very strong need to listen to the views of all stakeholders in order to find a compromise text acceptable for most. A legal measure which would be rejected by the stakeholders already at the beginning can bring about more harm than benefits. What we really need to avoid is to have a legal measure which the stakeholders will not accept and which they would therefore try to avoid.
11. This is a reason why we very much welcome an event such as this one because we can see it as an excellent platform for discussion and exchange of opinions.
12. Let me conclude with an information about the development of negotiations in relation to this proposal within the European Parliament. Last Thursday the European Parliament at the Plenary Session voted in support of this proposal and at the same time voted in favor of about 70 amendments. It clearly shows that this initiative has an added value and we are wishing to finalize this proposal if not during the Czech Presidency then may be during the Swedish one.
13. Thank you for your attention and I am looking forward to share our opinions on this topic in the discussions which will follow.