

Press Release
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The Fourth Railway Package's Technical Pillar on the buckled track to full interoperability in Europe

“The adoption of the General Approach by the Council on the Interoperability Directive is certainly a major step forward into the right direction - but not fully satisfying. Political views differ on a number of points from the sector's position. But on a number of aspects, these deviations are apparently due to some misconceptions, and I count on solving them with the help of the European Parliament rapporteur MEP Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE, ES),” said CER Executive Director Libor Lochman as a first reaction to the General Approach reached yesterday by the Transport Council.

Although the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) is generally glad to see the Technical Pillar heading in the right direction, some parts of the proposed legal framework on interoperability will have a negative impact on the European railway sector.

Articles 4, 20 and 21

If using vehicles for operational services requires vast technical work of engineers beforehand, many new entrants will never be able to start: this is why rail undertaking and infrastructure managers cannot bear the burden of tasks such as checking TSI parameters after the placing on the market and intensive compatibility checks before using a vehicle. The Council's text shall be corrected in a way which would allow railway undertakings obtaining vehicles 'fit-for-purpose', including the authorisation to place vehicles in service as proposed by CER. This shall only be followed by final operational checks executed by the railway undertaking before using the vehicle.

Article 14

The vehicle authorisation process must be completely streamlined and transparent. The Council rightly shaped the European Railway Agency as a one-stop-shop. A stronger ERA needs to be able to decide about vehicle authorisation, safety certification and trackside ERTMS, while cooperating closely with the national safety authorities. At the same time it must be better stated that all actors in the railway systems shall follow their clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and that Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSI) and notified national rules are the only rules to follow.

Articles 43 and 44

ERA shall not only be in the lead and responsible for vehicle authorisation and for the European vehicle register, but contrary to the Council's text, the European vehicle register shall be the only central database when a vehicle is supposed in run in more than one Member State only.

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Article 18

ERA shall and will rely on the competences and experiences of the national safety authorities. As ERA will be in charge of the European vehicle authorisation it shall be responsible for authorising ERTMS installed and operated throughout the Union's network as well. In fact, for ERTMS a strong coordination and definite authorisation by ERA is absolutely necessary, whereas the Council's General Approach goes in a different direction. ERA issuing non-binding opinions only is not sufficient at all and will lead to further diverging developments. ERA is needed for building the European railway area. The NSA's competences and experiences are needed in the European context as well as for authorising domestic services.

Article 6

In future vehicles shall move as free as possible across Europe or to the next station in the neighbouring country. ERA shall take over the vehicle authorisation gradually: the definition of the transition phase shall take into account the Agency's learning curve. Members of the group of representative bodies are to be allowed to request technical opinions when deficiencies in the TSIs are detected. In this way only the Agency can build up commonly a new vehicle authorisation process for Europe for the sector's benefit.

"Vehicle authorisation and safety certification are two fundamental processes that heavily affect the efficiency of the entire rail system. Streamlined procedures in these fields would have positive consequences on all consequent operations, for the sake of the sector and of an ever more sustainable European economy. I hope that the result made by the Council will be further tuned by Ms Bilbao Barandica and that we will have an inter-institutional agreement on a text which I hope will be both ambitious and usable", said CER Executive Director Libor Lochman.

For further information, please contact:

Eva Böckle

Press and Communications Manager

phone +32 2 213 08 90

mobile +32 473 32 20 94

e-mail eva.boeckle@cer.be

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together more than 70 European railway undertakings and infrastructure companies. CER represents the interests of its members towards the European institutions as well as other policy makers and transport actors. CER's main focus is promoting the strengthening of rail as essential to the creation of a sustainable transport system which is efficient, effective and environmentally sound. For more information, see www.cer.be