

## **PRESS – Europolitics / Isabelle Smets – 10 January 2013**

### **Rail transport**

#### **Freight operators applaud Belgian rail reform**

The European Rail Freight Association (ERFA), which is critical of rail reform in France, applauds the reform plans unveiled by Belgium, on 9 January. Belgium's Minister for Public Enterprises, Paul Magnette, announced that the current holding company structure that groups the different Belgian rail players will disappear on 1 January 2014, to be replaced by two independent entities: Infrabel for network management (development, maintenance, management and train path allocation) and the SNCB for transport (including management and maintenance of rolling stock). A joint SNCB-Infrabel subsidiary will be set up for personnel management. Belgian trade unions, which defend the single structure option, are up in arms over the reform.

The ERFA has slammed the rail reform under way in France, denouncing a model "controlled totally by the SNCF" that will hinder the entry of firms wishing to compete with the incumbent operator. But it welcomes the structure announced in Belgium, where "the infrastructure manager, Infrabel, and the historic operator, SNCB, will be totally separated without a holding company, as is the case at present". For the ERFA, this is a guarantee of the independence of the infrastructure manager from the transport operator, seen as necessary to ensure non-discriminatory access to new operators on the Belgian market. "The new structure is in line with the first railway package and the future fourth railway package. It guarantees open access to all operators without discrimination, avoiding any conflict of interests." The association hopes that the Belgian model "will inspire neighbouring countries that are currently reflecting on the future of rail organisation".