

A SINGLE LANGUAGE FOR THE SINGLE EUROPEAN RAILWAY AREA

ERFA input to the Evaluation of the Train Drivers' Directive

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ERFA believes that a single operational language, English, for international traffic is a necessary step towards an integrated Single European Railway Area, and should be part of the revision of the train drivers' directive (Directive 2007/59/EC).

As highlighted by the European Court of Auditors in its report *"Rail freight transport in the EU: still not on the right track"*, language requirements for train drivers is an administrative constraint, which hampers the competitiveness of the rail sector. The Recommendation 3b of the Court states:

"The Commission and the Member States should also assess the possibility of progressively simplifying language requirements for locomotive drivers to make medium- and long-distance rail freight traffic in the EU easier and more competitive."

The potential revision of the train drivers' directive is an opportunity for the European Commission to launch the process of harmonizing and simplifying language requirements through a progressive deployment of one

single operational language for international traffic. The aim is to make rail operations more efficient and competitive.

THE LACK OF INTEROPERABILITY, A MAJOR OBSTACLE FOR GROWTH

Today rail faces major competitive disadvantages vis-à-vis other modes of transport, in particular road: the fragmentation of the European Union rail network in 26 national rail systems largely undermines the great potential for rail businesses to attract more customers and passengers.

The language requirement for train drivers is one of the multiple obstacles faced by the rail sector to achieve an EU-wide rail interoperability. It limits cross-border operations and represents a major financial and administrative burden for railway undertakings (RUs). While important projects such as the deployment of ERTMS will contribute to achieve an integrated European rail network in the future, many trains will still need to stop at the national border in order to change train drivers because they do not speak the language required by the national infrastructure manager. A Railway Undertaking operating between e.g. Antwerp (BE) and Milan (IT) must provide drivers speaking at least 4 different languages (B1 level). To manage this situation, RUs manage staff with different languages skills and need to adapt operational processes. It is obvious that this is costly and cumbersome and thus limits the efficiency for seamless rail cross-border operations.

ERFA'S VISION: ONE RAIL SYSTEM, ONE LANGUAGE

ERFA fully supports the European Commission's vision to create a Single European Railway Area. This should also apply to language requirements. Train drivers are fully part of an open market and should be able to operate in/through different Member States without restriction due to patchy language requirements. This is one of the prerequisites for an EU wide rail market based on interoperability and competition and in addition will contribute to more flexibility for the individual employee.

Although the rail system has its own complex logics, we believe it is indispensable to have a look on the best practices from the road and the aviation sectors. Both are fully part of the Single Market and open to wide competition. Truck drivers operating in different road networks in Europe do not need to comply with a level B1 when crossing borders. There are often no language requirements at all or very low ones. On the contrary, aviation works with one single operational language, English, which allows a wide and open competition between all airlines by not putting at risk high safety standards.

Therefore, ERFA is convinced that a single operational language, English, for railways is the unique option to enable rail to compete better with other modes of transport by having simplified but improved language requirements in the EU. RUs and IMs will need to train their staff in only one extra language, which is easy, accessible and affordable.

In addition, a single operational language responds to the need for a common understanding on safety issues and standards. The deployment of a single operational language will reconcile the requirements for safety in the railways with the need for rail to be competitive at the supranational level.

RECOMMENDATION: A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH

We acknowledge that a single operational language is a medium-term target, which needs a step-by-step approach.



The full deployment of the single operational language will deliver quick and important interoperability benefits for railways.

IN A NUTSHELL: THE BENEFITS OF ONE SINGLE OPERATIONAL LANGUAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAFFIC



ERFA is convinced that a single operational language for international traffic is a simple but important step forward bringing supranational-orientation and competition in the European rail network as well as guaranteeing high safety standards.

ERFA is convinced that only the revision of the train drivers' directive (Directive 2007/59/EC) can solve the interoperability issues concerning language requirements.

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