

**Speech by Henrik Hololei**  
*DG MOVE's Director-General*

**"How can the EU be the driving force for a more competitive rail freight sector?  
Initiatives and vision for rail freight from the European Commission."**

- Thank you for this invitation and for this very interesting debate! Before coming to the theme of this evening's debate – Rail Freight – allow me to start with an update on the negotiations of the 4<sup>th</sup> RP. Trilogue negotiations with the EP are well under way, with only one final Trilogue remaining.

Let me encourage you, the sector, to encourage Member States to show flexibility in preparing the final negotiations, in order to facilitate a swift agreement with the EP.

- A good agreement will indeed increase legal certainty for the sector and provide a better level playing field for railway operators.
- What will come next? Implementation!
- The adoption of the 4th Railway Package will streamline and consolidate the EU railway legislation. We will then concentrate on the implementation of the legislative framework over the coming years and, in particular, on overcoming concrete obstacles.
- Let me come now to the topic of tonight's event.
- Rail freight is not in a very good shape. It is not necessary, I think, to expand on this. You all live this situation in your daily business.
- The Commission is aware of the difficult situation and this is exactly why rail freight is high on our agenda! We are convinced that Rail freight has a key role to play in the transport model of the future.
- Many of our initiatives and actions will contribute to improving the framework conditions for freight, for example:
  1. Our long-standing efforts towards **interoperability** between the different rail networks in Europe. With its strong European dimension, rail freight is particularly affected by the current lack of interoperability

- Here, let me mention a specific case: we were requested by the sector to address an issue, both urgent and important, namely the language requirements, which were perceived as too high for train drivers only reaching the first station after the border.
  - We came up with a solution in a timely manner. This solution should enter into force as soon as possible in order to provide you without delay with the necessary flexibility. However, we hear now that the entry into force should be postponed!
  - All I want to say is that postponing is not a solution: we set up the legal framework to ensure more flexibility. Now it is up to you, Railway Undertakings and Infrastructure Managers, to agree in a timely manner on practical arrangements within this framework.
  - The clock is running, let's focus on solutions instead of adding to the problem!
2. Our **infrastructure** development policy, namely the TEN-T policy, financially supported by the CEF. This is indeed clear that one success factor for the revitalisation of rail freight will be the development and the improvement of railway networks.
  3. The "**Shift to Rail**" initiative, because the competitiveness of this sector also depends on innovation, not only of infrastructure and rolling stock, but also processes and production models.
  4. **Digitalisation** of the rail sector. Rail freight has also to take advantage of the new digital solutions to improve its competitiveness.
  5. Finally the **4th Railway Package** of course: rail freight will benefit in many ways:
    - through the technical pillar, particularly through the simplification of procedures for vehicle approval and safety certificates and its role as system authority;
    - through the market pillar and its Governance provisions, particularly through the enhanced level playing field and mandatory coordination between IMs and the users of their networks.

- As mentioned, all these initiatives are complementary to the development of the Rail Freight Corridors, which remain the key element of our strategy to revitalise rail freight.
- All nine Rail Freight Corridors are now established and let me congratulate, again, the three of them that just started operation last November.
- We gathered substantial feedback since the entry into force of the Rail Freight Corridor Regulation. We are convinced that the Rail Freight Corridor concept was the right choice but at the same time the feedback we received shows that the Rail Freight Corridor concept could be strengthened and adapted to new needs, in order to better meet sector expectations.
- As you know, we have started an evaluation of the Rail Freight Corridor Regulation, in order to assess its implementation and its effects. Let me announce that, as part of our stakeholder consultation strategy, an open public consultation will be open in the coming days.
- It is on the basis of the results of this evaluation that we will assess the need for us to improve the policy framework. We need your input and we value it. I often tell my staff to proactively seek the views of stakeholders. Not only do we not have all the solutions, but we don't even know all the problems!
- We do know that some improvements can be achieved by the sector itself. But we will not prejudge the outcome and we will wait to see whether a revision of the Regulation is the right tool to meet urgent market demands.
- It is the right moment for me to warmly thank ERFA for its ambitious position paper on the "Further strengthening of the Rail Freight Corridors", which was submitted to us last week.
- ERFA strongly advocates a revision of the Regulation. We will duly take into account the analysis made in this paper.
- We will take into account, as well, the assessments by all stakeholders received by the Commission.
- We highly appreciate that the sector reflects on the future of the Rail Freight Corridors and more generally on the solutions to improve the competitiveness of rail freight.

- In the same vein, we highly appreciate that the Dutch Presidency, in close cooperation with DG MOVE, launched a reflection about the issues hampering rail freight, future scenarios and milestones.
- And ERFA, through its president Ms Tonndorf, has been an active member of the expert panel which has been set up on this occasion.
- Ms van Dongen described these activities very well. Let me say that we support the organization of the Business Conference on rail freight and the elaboration of both a Political declaration and sector commitments.
- At the risk of repeating myself: we will take this declaration and these commitments, their ambition, into account when assessing the need for improving the policy framework for the Rail Freight Corridors.
- We have all put a lot of energy into the Rail Freight Corridors. A lot of money as well. We now all have to boost those efforts to make rail freight more competitive! We should start now and not wait for further legislative changes.
- Let's be ambitious and make change happen faster!
- Thank you very much for your attention.