

Press Release – Strikes in Germany: DB InfraGO must fulfil its sovereign duty as an infrastructure manager

23 January 2024

The European rail freight sector has been watching the escalating wage dispute between the GDL and Deutsche Bahn (DB) with bewilderment. After 2-3 days of strikes in December and at the beginning of January, the GDL has now announced a 6-day strike from today (23 January), which in our view is completely disproportionate and will in turn have a significant impact on rail freight transport. This comes at a time when rail freight transport is already in a very critical situation due to the major infrastructure problems in Germany.

Although the ongoing dispute is actually a GDL-DB dispute between train drivers, the behaviour of individual GDL members at DB InfraGo is disrupting and interrupting important freight transport corridors, such as the Rhine Alpine corridor between Rotterdam and Milan, which is causing major financial damage to the affected rail freight companies and leading to a severe setback and loss of confidence in the relocation policy among customers.

It is particularly worrying and unacceptable that the competitor railways operating in Germany outside the DB Group, who have a market share in rail freight of almost 60% in Germany and 50% in the EU, are now also being dragged into the GDL/DB conflict and held hostage. Even these companies organised in ERFA, which could ensure European supply chains function and continue to drive forward the climate-friendly modal shift policy, cannot run their trains if DB dispatchers do not operate the signal boxes.

ERFA urgently appeals to both parties to the conflict to do everything in their power to ensure that the activities of the competing railways are not impaired. The GDL is called upon to limit its strike to DB train drivers only and to influence its members to maintain and not impair the infrastructure tasks at DB InfraGo so that the trains of the competitor railways can serve the important main corridors.

ERFA also urges DB to do everything in its power to fulfil its sovereign duties and its unconditional obligation as infrastructure manager. Prior to the second strike in January, the freight transport sector had already drawn DB InfraGo's attention to the key role played by individual dispatchers (e.g. Baden-Baden) in ensuring the smooth functioning of freight transport on the Rhine-Alpine corridor. The sector is now facing a third strike in just a few weeks this week and do not get the impression that appeals to DB InfraGO's obligation to perform will have any effect and that everything possible will be done to ensure that the transport service continues to function during the upcoming strike. We are firmly convinced that, with the knowledge gained from the previous strikes in December 2023 and January 2024

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regarding the neuralgic control centres, reasonable, dispositive measures can be taken to maintain services. Numerous rail freight companies will hold DB InfraGo liable for this.

ERFA President, Dirk Stahl, stressed, *“the strike is massively damaging to the European modal shift policy in rail freight transport. The parties to the dispute are called upon to fulfil their responsibility for a climate-friendly transport policy and to immediately avert the effects of the strike, at least on the competitive railways, and to release the important European freight corridors for operation by the competitive railways.”*

ERFA Secretary General, Conor Feighan, stated, *“any blockage of rail freight volumes on the German network will be felt strongly beyond Germany. Given that over 50% of rail freight crosses at least one national border, and the central position of Germany, the proposed strike actions will have an impact on actors, both domestically and internationally, who are not a party to the ongoing disputes.”*

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