

## EU rail policy in need of harmonisation and transparency

European railway operators need to cooperate more if they are to improve service, says Roberts Zile

**T**he EU must move forward with the technical pillar of the fourth railway package as this would remove administrative and technical barriers and allow railway companies to operate effectively around the European railway network, resulting in a more competitive and fair market for rail products. At present it is obvious that there are too many different national rules and often a lack of transparency in many procedures.

If our objective is for railway companies to freely operate throughout Europe, and to enjoy more efficient and business-friendly procedures for vehicle authorisation and safety certification, both in terms of timing and costs, then European procedures are urgently needed for international operators. These procedures are essential in ensuring that the railway sector regains competitiveness.

In any case, rail companies should not face a huge administrative burden when applying for the required safety certificates and proceeding with vehicle authorisation. These procedures must be proportionate to the scale at which the company operates. If railway operators find it more difficult to operate in the railway market due to increasingly expensive and unnecessary bureaucratic procedures requested by the EU, it has the potential to create problems and political consequences. Therefore, it is important to provide a choice for railway operators who do not intend to operate cross-border but strictly in one member state to approach the European railway agency (ERA) or local national safety authorities (NSA) for vehicle authorisation or operator safety certification procedures. This flexibility to proceed with national safety authorities directly would be more practical and cheaper, especially for rail companies in peripheral member states and those operating on so-called 'isolated networks'. Taking into account these considerations, the European parliament has proposed a four-year transition period for vehicle authorisations and safety certification, allowing rail companies to choose between the ERA and the NSAs.

We have also worked out a solution for so-called isolated networks, those with a different gauge size in the eastern European member states, mainly the Baltic states. These countries are actually well integrated into the wide 1520 mm

*"Rail companies should not face a huge administrative burden when applying for the required safety certificates and proceeding with vehicle authorisation"*



gauge network covering Russia and the commonwealth of independent states.

However, they remain isolated from the EU railway network. Obviously safety criteria on a different gauge size network do not differ from the EU main network, but what are notably different are the market situation and the competition environment. In this regard, parliament considers that railway interoperability between the Baltic states should be improved to make rail operations from north to south technically easier, particularly for locomotives. The NSAs of the Baltic states therefore should cooperate and work towards mutual acceptance and harmonised procedures. Such cooperation would be a valuable step in the direction of further integration of these member states into a single European railway area. Furthermore, this mutual cooperation would give a strong basis for the NSAs of those countries to continue with vehicle authorisation and safety certification procedures beyond a four-year transition period.

It is now our responsibility in the European parliament and the council to find a reasonable, well balanced, practical and workable solution to these issues. It must be ensured that EU legislation in general, and in this case all the involved institutions, work with maximum efficiency in the interest of the end users of cargo services, passengers and other stakeholders. ★

Roberts Zile is a member of parliament's transport and tourism committee