



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT

Directorate B - Investment, Innovative & Sustainable Transport
The Director

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Mr Mário LOPES
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Mr Henrique NETO
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Dear Mr Lopes,
Dear Mr Neto,

I acknowledge receipt of your letter to Commissioner Vălean of 30 July. Commissioner Vălean has asked me to reply on her behalf.

Interoperability of rail in the Iberian Peninsula and with the rest of the EU is indeed of high importance. That is why we created the TEN-T networks, of which the Atlantic Core Network Corridor which connects Portugal to Spain and further to the rest of Europe via France. The new rail lines which are or will be constructed and the rail lines which are or will be upgraded on that Corridor by 2030 (e.g. Lisboa-Porto, Sines-Grandola-Lisboa-Mérida) are creating a UIC gauge rail network in Portugal.


This being said, the UIC gauge is not needed everywhere. Actually, a full change of gauge in the Iberian Peninsula is not needed and would require massive investments, also at the level of the numerous ports, whose access to the national network is in Iberian gauge. From a legal point-of-view, the TEN-T Regulation actually only imposes UIC gauge for new lines (as of 2014). This is also the approach implemented by Spain. Moreover, other technical solutions than changing from Iberian to UIC gauge exist, including third rails, polyvalent sleepers and even variable axle gauge rolling stock (in the process of certification).

Furthermore, our studies and the operators clearly indicate that other interoperability parameters are even more important, such as electrification and the possibility to cater for freight trains up to 740 meters. Administrative barriers also form important obstacles and we are striving to address them as well.

Nevertheless, on the gauge and the other interoperability parameters, we are working closely with both Portugal and Spain, themselves cooperating with each other to ensure a coordinated and gradual evolution of their rail lines. They do so amongst others in their bilateral Summits and through AVEP.

Please rest assured that we are pursuing all efforts, including through co-funding, to ensure the interoperability of rail within the Iberian Peninsula and with the rest of Europe, in line with the applicable Regulations and with a high degree of dedication from both the Portuguese and Spanish Governments and Infrastructure Managers.

Yours sincerely,



Herald RUIJTERS