needs of rail users' and encourage 'better commercial arrangements between train companies and Network Rail'.

The government has also called for NR to devolve more power to its eight route management teams, which ORR feels would 'maximise the benefits of comparative regulation' while focusing on the local challenges in each area. It suggests a clearly-defined national 'system operator' should deal with network-wide planning and capacity issues. ■

INTERNATIONAL

East meets west

At its 2015 General Assembly in Bucharest (p56), Europe's railway supply industry association Unife highlighted its concerns about access for its members to Chinese and Japanese markets. An opportunity to meet potential Japanese customers face-to-face came shortly afterwards, during the 9th UIC High Speed congress in Tokyo (p3).

At a Unife-hosted reception on July 9, to which JR Group railways and many independent operators were invited, the Ambassador of the EU to Japan Viorel Istricoaia-Budura noted 'the willingness from both the European and the Japanese side to indeed engage in deepening our co-operation, in fostering business opportunities and thereby enhancing our common prosperity'.

Unife Director General Philippe Citoen stressed that securing better access to the Japanese market was 'absolutely essential' for Unife and its members. While the question was being addressed in the EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement negotiations, he believed the discussions should strive to create a level playing field in terms of access to both of our respective rail markets'. Japan was one of the world's 'top railway markets', he continued, but penetration by Europe's suppliers was 'less than 1%'. 'We would like to see significant contracts', for example in the commuter and inter-city markets, he said, adding that he expected 'major market access improvement' within the timeframe of the Free Trade Agreement negotiations.

Yuri Furusawa, Assistant Vice-Minister for International Affairs at the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport & Tourism, addresses the European-Japanese reception in Tokyo on July 9.

Both parties had a lot to offer and reported that there had been 'a very good discussion' with the Vice-Minister that morning. He was 'ready to offer the support of ERA in order to achieve mutual understanding, both in terms of technical requirements and standards, but also in terms of processes related to safety'.

JR East Executive Director & Chief Financial Officer Yuri Mortimoto hoped that 'communication between the two sides would become more active, leading in the near future to bear fruits in the form of concrete transaction as well as joint projects'. Observers view JR East as being relatively open to the awarding of contracts to European companies — its E5, E6 and E7 high speed trains are fitted with Knorr-Bremse brake components, for example — and in May it announced an international tender for DMU cars. Time will tell whether this indicates a change in policy.

On the other hand, JR East has made no secret of its ambition to win operat-