

UNIFE warns against complacency

Although an informal deal has been agreed for the Technical Pillar of the Fourth Railway Package, much remains to be done before it is adopted by member states. **Murray Hughes** reports from the UNIFE's 2015 General Assembly in Bucuresti.

UNIFE Chairman Lutz Bertling called for more investment in the Romanian rail network at the organisation's General Assembly in Bucuresti.

News that informal agreement had been reached on the Technical Pillar of the Fourth Railway Package could not have come at a better time for UNIFE's General Assembly in Bucuresti. The deal was agreed late on June 17, allowing UNIFE Chairman and President of Bombardier Transportation Lutz Bertling to enthuse to General Assembly attendees on the following morning that 'today is a very good day for our industry — the dialogue has done what we asked them to do. I really believe it is very, very good news for the industry, for customers and even for Europe'. Hailing the agreement as 'a great achievement', Bertling drew attention to the 'decisive role' played by UNIFE, adding that 'you cannot imagine the amount of lobbying' needed to reach this stage.

Executive Director of the European Railway Agency Dr Josef Doppelbauer agreed that June 17 was 'an historic day' but highlighted the delays attributable to political pressure. Outlining key issues reached in the compromise wording that had won the day, he was 'quite happy' with the outcome, but stressed that 'there is still a lot to do' before the formal agreement was adopted. The first reading in the European Parliament was set for October 8, he said, but he warned that the parties involved needed to 'be alert' as member states may try to meddle in the intervening period. ERA had meanwhile agreed with Luxembourg, which took over the presidency of the EU in July, that a major conference on the Technical Pillar would



be held shortly.

Doppelbauer warned that it was essential to determine precisely what had actually been agreed, and 'here the devil is in the detail'. ERA was establishing a Task Force to co-ordinate the programme of work and to decide what needed to be done, by whom and by when. A new IT platform would be set up through which all certification would be handled.

Of major concern was the time taken to reach agreement. Doppelbauer pointed out that it had taken seven years to come to a common understanding of authorisation under Directive 2008/57, adding that 'it will take two more years for member states to clean their processes to the master flow chart' which would govern progress. 'We need to be five times as fast

in understanding the new directive, as ERA cannot work with 25 different understandings and processes', he said. His vision was to choose the optimum level of standardisation, but not to standardise 'every nut and bolt'; some level of voluntary standardisation was envisaged.

In terms of a level playing field for rail, Doppelbauer flagged up the discrepancies that still existed between modes, citing the lack of access charges levied on long-distance buses, in Germany for example.

Outdated rules to be scrapped

Agreement on the Technical Pillar was welcomed by Olivier Onidi, Director of the European Mobility Network in the European Commission's DG-MOVE, as paving the way for 'a true European landscape for railways'. Arriving in Bucuresti after taking part in the dialogue discussions, he called for the pace of change to be accelerated. In a reference to the '3+1' implementation timescale, he said that he did not expect any member states to ask for the additional year.

Outlining more details of ERA's future role, Onidi said that European Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc would be writing to ERA's Executive Director with two requests. ERA would be asked to draw up 'a far-reaching programme' to rationalise the regulations governing

Round tables discussed the competitiveness of Europe's rail industry and EU railway policy.



railway operations across Europe. This would lead to scrapping of outdated and 'totally obsolete' rules, the identification of rules that were mutually recognised, and changes to rules that were not 'fit for purpose'. In the longer term, greater standardisation meant that TSIs in their current form could become 'something from the past', he predicted, adding that under Shift2Rail it would be possible 'to devise something that is interoperable from the start'.

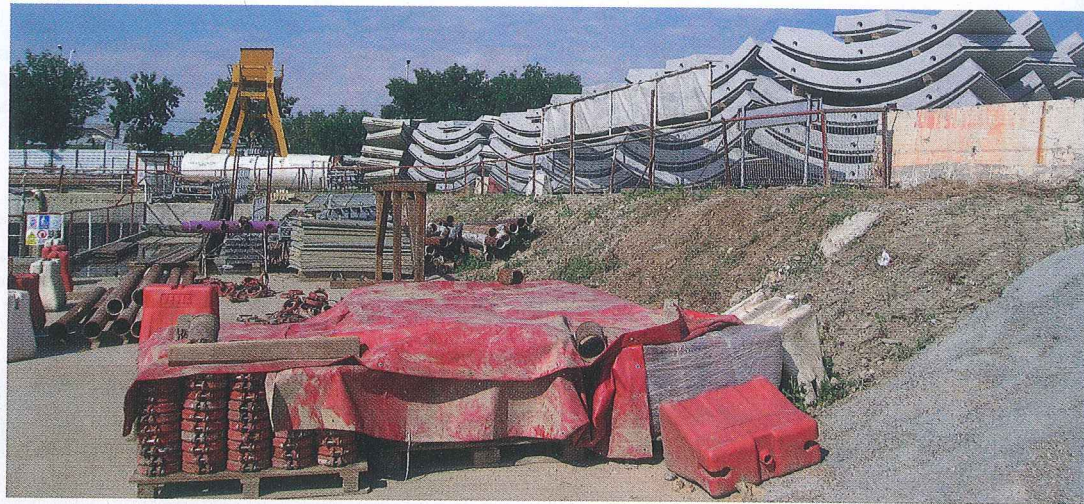
The second request was for ERA to put in place an 'occurrence reporting system' that could be shared among the various parties, detailing 'things that go wrong and have been corrected'. This was intended to enhance safety, as it was evident from recent accidents that other railways often had experience that could have been helpful in preventing them, Onidi said.

White Paper review

The General Assembly took place two weeks after the consultation period closed for a 'stocktaking review' of the European Commission's 2011 White Paper on Transport. UNIFE had expressed concern that the ambitious targets for rail set out in the White Paper risked being watered down, but MEP Claudia Țapardel, a Romanian shadow *rapporteur* who was actively engaged in the review, assured the Assembly that in her view rail transport retained the priority it had been accorded in the 2011 document. A draft report by Dutch MEP Wim Van de Camp was being discussed by the Transport & Tourism Committee, and this was expected to be adopted in a plenary session in September. Țapardel's assurances prompted Bertling to remark that the review appeared to be 'in good hands', but he warned that there were many interested parties who could interfere, so that 'we need to defend where we are'.

Call to invest in Eastern Europe

In the presence of Iulian Matache, Secretary of State for Transport in the Romanian government, Bertling took the opportunity to underline why UNIFE had chosen Bucuresti as its venue for the 2015 AGM. 'We decided to go to Bucuresti to demonstrate that we cared about



After the General Assembly delegates were able to visit a construction site for Line 5 of the Bucuresti metro.

the East European market and Romania especially', he asserted. Noting that 'Romania's rail system played a crucial role in the European network', Bertling hoped that the government would continue to invest in rail, affirming that the European Union had Structural Funds available. 'Billions of euros are waiting to be transformed into infrastructure and rolling stock', he emphasised.

Țapardel took up the call, agreeing that investment in transport infrastructure was 'a very important issue'. She was particularly concerned about the disparity between investment in rail projects in western and eastern Europe. It was 'her duty to raise this issue', and she called for the Commission to develop a new investment strategy for Eastern Europe and its borders.

In a video message to UNIFE members, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Crețu said that she expected EU funds for transport in 2014-20 to be similar to the €82bn made available in 2007-13. There were changes in Cohesion Policy funding, and she expected to 'focus more on intelligent and ecological solutions that encourage multimodal systems, alternative fuel, and less on investment in basic infrastructure such as road. For railways, we hope that the share via the Connecting Europe Facility and the Cohesion Fund will be larger compared to the previous period'.

Matache told attendees that the Romanian government had drawn up a Master Plan to provide a framework for

an investment programme up to 2030 focusing on improvements to the infrastructure. The Plan would be fully adopted by the end of July, he said, with funds provided from European sources, from the national budget and from PPP agreements. Its objectives were to improve connectivity, raise capacity and introduce further liberalisation, he explained.

Trade issues

UNIFE has consistently expressed concern about achieving fairness across the international trade spectrum. The topic has risen up the organisation's agenda as Chinese and Japanese interests have gained footholds in the European market, one example being the agreement signed last December between railway authorities in Serbia and Hungary for China to be involved with upgrading of the Beograd - Budapest corridor.

Iuliu Winkler, Vice-President of the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade, told the Assembly that slow progress was being made in trade negotiations between Europe and Japan, whose focus was more 'trans-Pacific'. On the other hand, a meeting just a week earlier with Chinese representatives had showed 'some progress' about the openness of the Chinese market.

Major changes were expected in the rules governing public procurement, reported Joaquim Nuñez de Almeida, Director, Single Market for Public Administrations at DG GROW. The aim was to eliminate red tape, waste and corruption, he said, and to make public procurement 'business-friendly'.

It was left to Alstom Transport President Henri Poupart-Lafarge to underline the urgent need for Europe's rail policy-makers to act quickly for the benefit of the industry. Calling for faster roll-out of technology and skill sets, he felt that speed and time were critical. 'I feel we are on a burning platform', he said, as competitors were moving 'very fast'. ■

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LUTZ BERTLING CHAIRMAN, UNIFE &
PRESIDENT, BOMBARDIER TRANSPORTATION

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82
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