



Press Release

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Ukrainian Railways and Eglė Šimė, CEO of LTG Cargo, receive 2023 European Railway Award

The 2023 [European Railway Award](#) was held in Brussels today in a 16th edition strongly marked by current events in Ukraine and the sector's commitment to diversity. The *Rail Champion* prize was presented to [Ukrainian Railways](#) (UZ) for their remarkable resilience and continuation of transport services in times of war and unimaginable hardship. Additionally, Eglė Šimė was recognised as this year's *Rail Trailblazer* for her focus on empowering women in railways while ably steering her company, [LTG Cargo](#), through tumultuous times. The awards were bestowed during a prestigious ceremony at Belgium's Royal Museums of Fine Arts, in the presence of high-level European Commission officials, Members of the European Parliament, the Swedish Presidency of the EU represented by Swedish Minister for Infrastructure and Housing Andreas Carlson, and [Ukrainian Ambassador to the EU](#) Vsevolod Chentsov.

Greeted by hosts Philippe Citroën, [UNIFE](#) Director General, and Alberto Mazzola, [CER](#) Executive Director, guests heard from a range of speakers, starting with a [video message](#) from [European Parliament President Roberta Metsola](#), "Rail transport, she said, will play an important part in Europe's plan to become climate neutral by 2050." [Andreas Carlson, Sweden's Minister for Infrastructure and Housing](#), presented the outlook for rail policy during the Swedish EU Presidency, noting "I would like to stress the importance of well-functioning, efficient transport systems for Europe's competitiveness. Transport is the backbone of our economy, and rail plays a significant part."

The European Railway Award's **Rail Champion** title is an honorary recognition jointly bestowed by the organisers. Recent tragic events in Ukraine and the remarkable efforts to keep transport lines open, made **Ukrainian Railways (UZ)** an obvious recipient for this year's prize. Since the start of the war, Ukrainian Railways have provided a lifeline to millions of displaced citizens and kept vital aid and supplies flowing through the country. Working under the most difficult and dangerous conditions, UZ employees' heroic efforts are ensuring the continuation of transport services according to a regular railway schedule. These efforts demonstrate the enormous resilience and crisis fitness of the railway system and the importance of strong railway companies. Ukrainian Railways' everyday struggle and ongoing achievement was deemed highly deserving of the Rail Champion Award, which also served to underline the EU community's solidarity and support.

Board Member of Ukrainian Railways Oleksandr Pertsovskiy was present to collect the Award on behalf of UZ and its entire workforce. In his acceptance speech, he said: "It's an honour for the Ukrainian railway workers who keep doing their job on a daily basis despite constant shellings and infrastructure damage. We have managed to evacuate more than 4 m people by rail, 1 m of them being children. So, my first point here is a massive "thank you" to all railway workers in Europe who ensured their route to safety, and to ordinary Europeans for generously hosting and caring about our children. It's important for us, the railwaymen, to know that those children that we have saved – and paid with 327 lives for that – are cared about.

My second point is that war is no excuse for us to not keep enhancing our service quality and find new Euro integration routes. More railway connections with Poland and Romania in the recent months are vivid proof of that, and we are striving for more. So, I hereby invite all the railways in Europe and beyond to help Ukraine speed up the



victory, to work with us on establishing more connections, and to personally visit Kyiv by safe and comfortable trains of Ukrzaliznytsia.”

Crises like the war in Ukraine were at the heart of the ceremony’s roundtable discussion this year, titled “Capacity building for crisis-proof rail.” **European Commission Director-General for Mobility and Transport Henrik Hololei** gave his perspective: “I am humbled and inspired by the work of everyone behind Ukrzaliznytsia to evacuate the injured and to continue transporting what Ukraine produces, and what its people desperately need. This award recognises that determination to continue, not to be bowed. What we have achieved together during these dark days is here to stay: Ukrzaliznytsia will be indispensable for the reconstruction of Ukraine and for deepening EU-Ukraine relations, and I look forward to welcoming Ukraine’s impressive rail network into the EU.”

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Member of the European Parliament, also took part in the debate, reflecting that: “Rail must play a central role in the integrated European mobility system. However, it needs States to commit to the pledges they have made to invest in infrastructure, digitisation and decarbonisation. Delays penalise the return on the investments we have already made. They also prevent us from enjoying the EU single railway area; they block the emergence of modern, quality services and the attraction of customers. Without this impetus, it will be impossible for transport to meet the climate targets set for it in the Green Deal. Nor will it be able to contribute all it can to the competitiveness of the Union.”

Andreas Matthä, CER Chair and CEO of Austrian Federal railways ÖBB, took the opportunity to underline: “This is a very special evening for CER - we’re finally getting together again in person at a time when the rail sector is facing huge challenges. Just as we are recovering from the financial burden of Covid, we now have to deal with skyrocketing energy prices. We are asking the European Union to take decisive action to support the railway sector, both financially and in terms of regulation, so that we can continue to be a reliable partner for both passengers and industry.” He added: “As CER Chair, I’d like to extend my warmest congratulations to tonight’s award winners. They have once again demonstrated the resilience and innovative potential of the railway sector. Our gathering tonight leaves me with great optimism for the future of Europe’s railways.”

The second major topic of the evening was better representation of women in rail. This is a priority issue for the sector, where women and girls represent more than 50% of the passenger rail ridership but only compose approximately 20% of the workforce. Conscious that a more mixed workforce leads to a proven increase in problem-solving competence and innovative strength, companies are taking action to redress the gender balance, but there needs to be more awareness to keep the momentum going. That is why the event’s Rail Trailblazer prize was dedicated to achievements promoting women in rail. Selected by a jury of policy makers, sector experts, and journalists, the **2023 Rail Trailblazer** is **Eglė Šimė, CEO of LTG Cargo**, for her focus on empowering women in railways while ably steering her company through tumultuous times.

LTG Cargo, a subsidiary of Lithuanian Railways, is one of the largest freight transportation businesses in the Baltic region. While the company has faced a number of challenges in recent months, not least due to geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe and the war in Ukraine, Ms Šimė has not neglected the working environment and is contributing to stronger female career progression within the company. Ms Šimė is outspoken about the fears many women share about their careers; as CEO she has used her leadership skills to transform the company culture by making a priority of encouraging all employees, especially women, to make the most of opportunities to learn, improve and take responsibility, and to not be afraid of change. She is an ambassador of the LTG Women Club and has mentored several female colleagues. When Eglė Šimė first joined LTG Cargo in 2019, women only constituted 19% of the company’s management. Under her supervision, the number of woman managers at LTG Cargo has in just a few years reached 26%. Ms Šimė is also a trailblazer in other respects having guided her company through the biggest digitalisation project in LTG Cargo’s history.



When collecting the award, **Eglė Šimė** stated: *“This award to me is about the possibility and the need to change. I feel honoured by this recognition and accept it as an encouragement to continue strengthening our company in changing our business focus from East to West and, hopefully, inspire other women in the sector to build confidence and dare choosing careers they can thrive on.”*

The Rail Trailblazer trophy was accompanied by a €10,000 donation to the charity of the laureate’s choice. Ms Šimė decided to give the prize money to the [Olena Zelenska Foundation](#), a charitable organisation set up by the First Lady of Ukraine to help restore people’s lives affected by the war.

Henri Poupart-Lafarge, UNIFE Chair and Chairman and CEO of Alstom, commented on the significance of the Award: *“Heartfelt congratulations to this year’s winners of the European Rail Award! The Ukrainian Railways’ dedication and performance is an inspiration to us all and they have the full support of the European railway sector.*

In parallel, Mrs Šimė’s work at LTG Cargo demonstrates that we can successfully address the digitalization of our processes and improve our gender diversity when we face these challenges with sufficient determination.”

First organised in 2007, the European Railway Award celebrates and recognises outstanding contributions to the rail sector. The 2023 Award ceremony attracted hundreds of guests from across Europe, including local, national and EU-level politicians and transport stakeholders.

For further information, please visit our twitter account [@EU_RailwayAward](#) and www.europeanrailwayaward.eu or contact:

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The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together railway undertakings, their national associations as well as infrastructure managers and vehicle leasing companies. The membership is made up of long-established bodies, new entrants and both private and public enterprises, representing 78% of the rail network length, 81% of the rail freight business and about 94% of rail passenger operations in EU, EFTA and EU accession countries. CER represents the interests of its members towards EU policy makers and transport stakeholders, advocating rail as the backbone of a competitive and sustainable transport system in Europe. For more information, visit www.cer.be or follow [@CER_railways](#) on Twitter or [LinkedIn](#).

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UNIFE represents the European Rail Supply Industry in Brussels since 1992. The association gathers more than 100 of Europe’s leading large and medium-sized rail supply companies active in the design, manufacture, maintenance and refurbishment of rail transport systems, subsystems and related equipment. UNIFE also brings together 13 national rail industry associations of European countries. For more information, visit www.unife.org or follow [@unife](#) on Twitter or [LinkedIn](#).