

UNIFE-ERWA®: Building resilience and quality in the global supply of railway wheels and wheelsets

Supply chain resilience has become a global priority for the railway sector.

In recent years, supply chain disruption, geopolitical tension and rising environmental, social, and governance (ESG) expectations have highlighted the strategic importance of maintaining a consistent and reliable supply of critical train components such as wheels, axles and wheelsets. To better understand the European industry's perspective on a topic that affects operators and manufacturers worldwide, we spoke with **Stefanos Gogos**, technical affairs manager at UNIFE, who advises the association's Wheels and Wheelsets committee (ERWA®).

IRJ: Why is the wheelset supply chain so critical in today's global railway market?

Gogos: Wheels, axles and wheelsets are safety-critical components of every rail vehicle. Their performance has a direct impact on operational safety, fleet availability and lifecycle cost. Operators and original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) require reliable and sustainable solutions to ensure continuity of service. To meet these requirements and to deliver high levels of quality, in recent decades the European rail supply industry has invested in technical expertise and advanced quality-control processes to develop suitable products. The sector has also demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainability through its active involvement in research and development programmes, including Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking initiatives, which are proving crucial for the development of new innovative technologies and for strengthening the competitiveness of the entire supply chain.

IRJ: With reviews of supply chain resilience underway in many markets, how important is it to produce these safety-critical components within Europe?

Gogos: The goal is not to close markets but to increase the robustness of the supply chain. Locating production capacity close to major markets, combined with sharing technical standards and local service capabilities, helps to reduce the risk of delays and unforeseen costs. Collaboration with global partners remains essential. However, these relationships must be based on fair and transparent competition, enabled by a genuinely level playing field.



IRJ: Let's talk about sustainability. What are the expectations of the market?

Gogos: Sustainability is no longer a value-added feature, it is a requirement of many OEMs and increasingly specified in tenders. The European supply industry is now able to offer solutions with high levels of recyclability that reduce emissions during manufacture and which are also designed to limit noise and wear. However, for competition to be truly fair, these criteria must be recognised and shared internationally.



Stefanos Gogos

IRJ: In this context, the idea of introducing a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is becoming more popular. Why is it relevant to your sector?

Gogos: CBAM is meant to ensure a level playing field between suppliers by addressing carbon-related distortions. However, wheels, axles and wheelsets are currently not included in the scope of CBAM. This creates an imbalance between European manufacturers that are investing heavily to meet stringent environmental standards and imported products which may not be subject to the same requirements. We are not asking for barriers, but for fairness, transparency and alignment of standards. This will ensure the market can correctly assess product quality, environmental impact and total cost of ownership during procurement.

IRJ: What is the key message ERWA® wants to convey to the international audience?

Gogos: The European rail supply industry has innovative and high-quality products to offer to the market, and we are committed to working together to raise global levels of safety, quality and sustainability. Rail operators need reliable products, consistent support and solutions aligned with ESG objectives. Europe has the experience and capability to contribute to these goals and is committed to doing so.