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# ALL ABOARD FOR A EUROPEAN YEAR OF RAILWAY WORKERS 2021

- ETF's Proposals for a Successful Year of Rail 2021 -



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## ALL ABOARD FOR A EUROPEAN YEAR OF RAILWAY WORKERS 2021

### ETF's Proposals for a Successful Year of Rail 2021

#### PREAMBLE

In March 2020 the European Commission proposed to declare the year 2021 as the EUROPEAN YEAR OF RAIL, with the objective to promote rail as an attractive mode of transport in view of the EU's ambitious climate objectives. On 12 November 2020, the European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement subject to final approval by the European Parliament but putting next Year on the right track to become EYR.

The Commission refers in its proposal to the "European Green Deal as an integral part of the Commission's strategy to implement the United Nation's 2030 Agenda and sustainable development goal" and to "the objective of achieving a climate-neutral European Union by 2050. The European Green Deal calls in particular for an acceleration of the shift to sustainable and smart mobility, as transport accounts for a quarter of the Union's greenhouse gas emissions, and numbers are still growing. "As one of the most environmentally friendly and energy-efficient transport modes, rail has a significant role to play in fast-tracking the reduction in transport emissions".

**The ETF welcomes this initiative, which is intended to underline the key role of railways in implementing the "European Green Deal" and we are committed to actively contribute to the activities as well as to the debate on the right political strategy to allow rail to play its critical role. This requires cooperation instead of intra-sector competition, a clear political commitment to boost rail that translates into proper funding at national and European level, fair treatment for all transport modes and avoiding social dumping in all transport modes. There must be a focus on cooperation within the railway sector and with other modes of transport.**

***However, the focus must also be on the railway employees who enable the smooth running of the sector. It is in this vein that we call for a "European Year of Railway Workers".***

Only the commitment of employees -through their skills, their initial and continuous training -guarantees the smooth functioning of railways. During the COVID-19 pandemic, railway employees made it possible to maintain transport services, in passenger and freight transport. They are on the front line, in direct contact with passengers, and run the risk of becoming infected with the virus while carrying out their daily duties. They are key workers who ensure that essential goods and medical personnel reach their destination. Their contribution to





society must be recognised. Therefore, the "European Year of Rail" must also become the "European Year of Railway Workers".

Many railways have problems attracting new employees, particularly young workers, which is a clear indication that working conditions have considerably deteriorated since the liberalisation imposed by the railway packages.

There is also a lack of female workers, who are not attracted by the current working conditions. In terms of a united and social Europe, working conditions in domestic and cross-border transport, as well as qualification and training, must be improved with a high level of requirements.

Therefore, initiatives to promote the attractiveness of the railway profession with regards to Europe-wide regulated training for safety-relevant professions including a minimum duration of training, equal pay for the same work in the same place, work-life balance, career development, protection against violence and fair working conditions are highly recommended.

As those who defend the rights of railway workers, respecting the railway profession and combating wage-, safety- and social dumping is an essential demand. However, this demand is also crucial to ensure the resilience, economic sustainability and social utility of the sector.

In this regard, ETF welcomes the statement of the EP Transport Committee in its report from 14 October 2020 which refers directly to railway staff:

***amendment 5: Recital (8a new)***

***.....The role of motivated staff cannot be underestimated and guarantees the smoothness of operations. The rail sector, however, has problems attracting new employees. In order to reach its full potential, it needs to diversify its workforce and in particular, attract women and young workers. This perspective should be promoted at all institutional levels.***

However, the ETF cannot say the same for the European' Commission's proposal, which is devoid of reference to transport workers. Furthermore, in the planned coordination activities at national and at European level, trade unions representatives or 'social partners', are not considered as a relevant representative group in the railway sector. The ETF denounces the non-existence of railway workers in the Commission's proposal.

The Commission implies the latter in article 5 "Coordination at Union level", paragraph 3: "The Commission shall convene regular meetings of stakeholders and representatives of organisations or bodies active in the field of rail transport,



including existing transnational networks and relevant NGOs, as well as of youth organisations and communities, to assist it in implementing the European Year at Union level".

In this paper, the ETF sets out key principles for success and to make 2021 the European Year of Railway Workers in cooperation with the trade unions that represent them.

## **1. During the "Year of Rail" we call for fair and quality working conditions for all employees of the railway sector**

### **1.1. Safe working conditions**

- We demand safe working conditions for all railway employees: uniform safety and security standards in all railway and transport companies guaranteeing higher and harmonised safety and quality standards. Railway workers often experience insults, threats and physical attacks. Employers must do more to meet their obligation of preventive care. We demand Provision of safety and personnel equipment, regular training measures and training for managers.
- Putting a stop to the use of temporary work agency workers for safety-relevant railway occupations such as locomotive drivers and maintenance workers. High qualification levels of all safety-relevant railway occupations and their certification for railway safety in an open and competitive market must be ensured.
- We want to keep train crews on board of trains. Human presence in the rail sector is important for quality public services, including station personnel.
- We demand double-staffing all trains with onboard personnel in regional transport, additional security personnel on lines with increased passenger volume or special security risks.
- We demand to stop out-sourcing of functions in the rail sector such as maintenance, catering, night train attendants, cleaning, etc. that is creating precarious conditions and a race to the bottom. We ask for the application of the railway collective bargaining agreements also on staff with non-operational functions.
- We insist on applying the principle of "the same wages for the same work at the same place" to mobile railway workers who work across borders on the train. This is crucial to succeed in our fight against social dumping, which also exists in the rail sector.
- We call for monitoring and enforcement of working, driving and rest time rules of mobile railway workers at national level and across borders. Relevant authorities must undertake cross-border cooperation and inspections.





## 1.2. Fair working conditions in the time of digitalisation and automation

- Automation and digitalisation processes will change the face of railway work. They should help to improve and increase the efficiency of the overall railway system and thus to contribute to the European Green Deal. But, at the same time, they should improve working conditions and contribute to quality employment.
- The human element must remain central to all changes. The human being that means taking the workers on board (social dialogue, qualification, work motivation, health), plays an important role in the successful implementation of digital changes. 'Workers' representatives and trade unions must be involved from an early stage in the planning, development and introduction of digital innovations at company-level. Digital transformation must be transparent and only take place with the participation of all employees and their representatives.
- Collective bargaining negotiations with 'employers' associations and companies are the most effective way to address and mitigate the effects of automation on work and working conditions, to tackle job losses, to make sure the workforce has the right skills for the future. The continuous qualification of employees is and must remain a priority topic within the Europe-wide digitalisation.
- Collective bargaining agreements must stipulate that employees are entitled to be trained for required qualifications if their job description changes due to digitalisation.
- The up-coming findings of the "EDA Rail" project of the social partners CER and ETF will focus on topics of digitalisation and automation and the associated changes in the economy and the world of work. The project results are intended to help shape the political debate surrounding digitalisation and automation and to show transport companies and the concerned trade unions ways to ensure attractive working conditions in the sector.

## 1.3. Attracting women and young workers with quality working conditions

We demand working conditions that attract women to the rail sector. Women account for less than 20% of the railway workforce in the European railway sector, a figure that is alarmingly below the 46% participation rate of women in the labour market. Trade unions are convinced that the situation needs to change to avoid missing out on the valuable contribution of women, to promote diversity in the workplace, and eventually harmonise the railway sector's image with the reality of the society in which rail customers live. Better integration and participation of women in the railway sector is our priority. Therefore, the Social Partners are currently conducting negotiations for an autonomous European agreement on women in rail (in line with Article 155 TFEU).

Moreover, concrete efforts need to be made by companies towards promoting a career in the rail sector. Working in railways must be perceived as attractive, and efforts need to focus on promoting the employment of women and young





workers. We need a life-long learning culture, continuous training, decent working places and measures to retain young workers and high skilled workers by making the job more attractive and offering job security.

#### **1.4. Strengthening Social Dialogue with employers at national and European level**

The European Commission states that experiences during the COVID 19 pandemic have shown that countries with a strong social dialogue manage the health crisis better and recover much quicker than those without.

It is in this vein that we call on Member States to use the European Year of Rail 2021 to strengthen social dialogue in the rail sector. A strong bi-partite and, or tri-partite social dialogue is important to meet the challenges in the rail sector.

We call on the European Commission to support social dialogue at national and European level in the rail sector as an element of the Year's activities.

At European level, the European social partners, ETF and CER, are committed to contributing to both, the strengthening of the social dialogue and the strengthening of the rail sector by achieving an autonomous agreement on Women in Rail.

## **2. Necessary measures to boost rail freight and passenger transport**

The European Commission explains the choice of the year 2021 with the "first full Year where the rules agreed under the Fourth Railway Package will be implemented throughout the Union, namely on the opening of the market of domestic passenger services and on reducing costs and administrative burden for railway undertakings operating across the Union".

The ETF, however, is of the opinion that the EU railway policy's focus on liberalisation and market opening has failed to deliver and instead, has fostered social shortcomings in the sector.

### **2.1 Rail freight transport**

Rail freight transport is fully liberalised since 2006. In the 14 years of open markets and intra-sector competition increased with the development of social shortcomings in the rail sector and without increasing the modal share of rail freight transport.

We believe another policy is necessary to actively promote rail freight transport as a "service of general interest", for example:

- Return on experiences with the liberalisation of rail freight in Europe;
- Safeguarding and promoting the single wagonload business; changing the European state aid rules to fund single wagonload businesses publicly;
- Invest in infrastructure that gives access to industrial sidings, ports, regional industries;





- Develop rail freight corridors while respecting safety measures and social sustainability. This means high qualifications of locomotive drivers operating on the corridors. The development of these corridors must not implicate social dumping practices.
- Promote cooperation between rail companies to serve better the needs of freight customers rather than foster competition;
- Continue to improve the interoperability of European railways while respecting operational safety, health and safety, qualifications and of workers (sanitation needs, toilets on freight trains).

Furthermore, the following measures are essential to increase the share of the environmentally friendly railways:

- The increase of the modal split in rail freight transport can be achieved by rapidly eliminating social dumping between transport sectors. This includes, among other measures, the abolition of unacceptable inhumane working and living conditions for many employees in other transport sectors such as road and aviation. A Europe-wide standardisation of truck tolls and investments in rail infrastructure are also essential to increase the modal split.
- Funding systems are needed to encourage shippers to make use of freight transport and thus create stable and sustainable employment.
- Rail transport, which stands for public services of general interest and climate protection, must no longer be disadvantaged by existing intermodal distortions of competition. Subsidies for the train path prices, rail stations and facilities as well as for single wagonload transport, relief of rail transport from taxes (such as the electricity tax) and charges and the full application of the polluter pays principle for all transport modes could reduce distortions of competition.

## 2.2 Rail passenger transport

In rail passenger transport, we take note of initiatives to develop international rail passenger corridors and to develop European night trains. We support ideas to use Public Service Obligations for international long-distance passenger services as well. International rail passenger services are fully liberalised since 2010, and as in the freight sector, competition did not deliver. Even more, night trains disappeared in many countries.

The development of national passenger transport, international passenger corridors, and the promotion of night trains must be based on socially sound employment and working conditions. Developing passenger transport cannot be akin to the development of low-cost business models for rail similar to Uber, Flixbus or Ryanair.

Furthermore, ETF demands a strengthening of rail transport in agglomerations and regions to promote climate- and people-friendly transport and thus also to



create and maintain high-quality jobs. It is crucial to give priority to the quality of services rather than the reduction of personnel costs. This will ensure quality and long-term jobs for the younger generation.

The development of rail freight and passenger transport should entail:

- Growth in the mobility sector should be used for more employment, more safe and good jobs - for men and women - through necessary training, qualifications and upskilling.
- The swift implementation of the European Green Deal in harmony with EU's environmental policy objectives despite the current COVID-19 crisis.
- The European Year of Rail in 2021 must be used as a way to rethink European railway policy as well as the European transport policies in general.

### 3. Suggested activities for the European Year of Rail

**For the ETF, the European Year of Rail should promote** initiatives to improve and promote the attractiveness of the railway profession with regards to Europe-wide regulated training for safety-relevant professions including a minimum duration of training, equal pay at the same place, work-life balance, career development, fair working conditions and protection against the violation of 'workers' rights.

Furthermore, the ETF calls for an analysis of the reasons why the process of liberalisation implemented since 1995 has not proven effective. We will collect best practice examples to promote rail transport, direct awarding of public service contracts, investments in the regional infrastructure and promotion of freight transport.

In the framework of the European Year of Rail, the ETF commits to:

- Showcasing the contribution of railways to a more environmentally friendly and safer Europe - by means of online conferences and training events at European (ETF) and national level (ETF affiliates) on various railway topics;
- Sharing information on working conditions of railway workers in different European countries, men and women, in different railway fields with the public to raise awareness on 'workers' commitment towards keeping Europe moving but also on the social shortcomings in the rail sector);
- Intensifying political campaigning for more investments in railways at European and at national level, as well for the consequent implementation of the European Green Deal;
- Intensifying communication from the perspective of railway workers.