

ETF motion adopted at the ETUC 15th Congress

Fret SNCF: when the dogma of competition disbands the energy transition.

On January 18, the European Commission launched an investigation into the French public rail freight company Fret SNCF. This investigation targets state aid granted to the public company between 2007 and 2019.

This procedure aims to determine the existence of State aid and, if it is found, its compatibility with the rules. The measures in question are the following:

- The cash advances made by SNCF to Fret SNCF since the beginning of 2007 and at least until the transformation of the latter into a commercial company (which took place on January 1, 2020), the amount of which is estimated at between 4 and 4.3 billion euros;
- The cancellation of the financial debt (a total of €5.3 billion, including the above-mentioned cash advances) by law in 2019, at the time of the spin-off of Fret SNCF;
- The capital injection of €170 million made when Fret SNCF was transformed into a commercial company.

While the investigation is not yet closed, the French government yesterday brought together the trade unions and SNCF management to announce a "discontinuity" scenario.

This situation is particularly unfair. Even though Fret SNCF was returning to equilibrium thanks to the work of the railwaywomen and railwaymen, the "discontinuity" imposes its dismantling. It is the entire work of the employees that is denied and reduced to nothing for the benefit of a vision strictly focused on competition.

This decision also reflects the political paradoxes. The energy transition is on everyone's lips but does not prevent Fret from being brought down. For the European Commission, the energy transition is soluble in the dogma of competition.

The investigation procedure launched by the European Commission left, in fact, two possibilities to the State:

1. the contestation of the results of the investigation and the contentious appeal;
2. negotiating the "discontinuity".

The State and SNCF management considered that the challenge was lost in advance. Therefore, only the implementation of the discontinuity would allow to "save the public transport of goods".

The announcements are particularly brutal and point to a particularly bleak future.

This discontinuity means concretely :

- The liquidation of the Fret SNCF Company
- The elimination of 500 jobs
- The abandonment of 30% of the traffic and the impossibility of bidding on this traffic for 10 years
- The transfer of locomotives to operators taking over Fret SNCF traffic
- The division of Fret into 2 subsidiaries and the opening of their capital.

This situation is based on a purely technical vision that considers that the markets can pass from one operator to another without taking into account the employees who make the railways at any moment.

This decision reflects a paradox that threatens our future! How can we undermine a tool that is essential to the energy transition in favour of a strict dogmatic vision?

The stakes are obviously social. They are also, quite simply, those of our common destiny, of the construction of a fair and efficient energy transition, of our future.

The ETUC gives its full support to the employees of Fret SNCF and to all rail workers.