

# Strengthening Europe’s Rail Network as a Cohesion and Integration Instrument

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## **Recognising that:**

- Stronger transport infrastructure in general, and railways in particular, are essential to greater European cohesion and thus to an ever closer Union;
- Improving the EU’s transport links to candidate countries, especially those where the influence of third-party countries like Russia is strongest, would strengthen Europe’s standing and help counteract this influence<sup>1</sup>.
- By the same token, increased rail connections between the centre of the Union and its more peripheral Member-States are a fundamental step not only towards a more successful energy transition but also to drive development across the Union, ensure cohesion, and combat public Euroscepticism<sup>2</sup>.
- Lack of supply in the more peripheral regions of the EU ensures railway prices are higher compared to more central areas<sup>3</sup>.

## **Acknowledging that:**

- Better railway connections between the EU and Ukraine and Moldova are necessary and have been recognised as such by Commissioner-designate for Transport, Apostolos Tzitzikostas<sup>4</sup>.
- Romania lacks high-speed railways and needs improved connections to the rest of the Union<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, ‘Strategy for the EU Integration of the Ukrainian and Moldovan Rail Systems’ (European Commission, 11 July 2023), [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ed9f1ecd-6c18-4bc4-b18a-8a49b9a7039a\\_en?filename=Integration\\_of\\_the\\_UAMD\\_railway\\_system\\_into\\_the\\_EU\\_transport\\_system.pdf](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ed9f1ecd-6c18-4bc4-b18a-8a49b9a7039a_en?filename=Integration_of_the_UAMD_railway_system_into_the_EU_transport_system.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Shomik Mehndiratta et al., ‘Climate Action: How Can EU Countries Unlock the Potential of Railways?’, World Bank Blogs, 11 March 2024, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/transport/climate-action-how-can-eu-countries-unlock-potential-railways>; ‘“Europe’s Choice”: Railways for a Competitive Union’, Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies, 18 July 2024, <https://www.cer.be/cer-press-releases/europes-choice-railways-for-a-competitive-union>.

<sup>3</sup> Antonio De Rose, Kasper Trier Jørgensen, and Niko Dokleštic, ‘Study on Passenger and Freight Rail Transport Services’ Prices to Final Customers: Final Report’ (European Commission, 2024), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2832/403804>.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Hearing of Apostolos Tzitzikostas, Commissioner-Designate (Sustainable Transport and Tourism)’ (Brussels, 4 November 2024), 6, [https://hearings.elections.europa.eu/documents/tzitzikostas/tzitzikostas\\_verbatimreporthearing-original.pdf](https://hearings.elections.europa.eu/documents/tzitzikostas/tzitzikostas_verbatimreporthearing-original.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> European Court of Auditors, ‘A European High-Speed Rail Network: Not a Reality but an Ineffective Patchwork’, 2018, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/high-speed-rail-19-2018/en/#chapter0>.

- Greece lacks high-speed railways, while both Greece and Bulgaria lack high-speed connections to the rest of the Union and have insufficient railway links between the two<sup>6</sup>.
- Portugal is in the process of projecting and building the first high-speed rail link between Lisbon and Madrid, but its extension to the rest of the continent is still to be done.
- Different track gauges in many Member States and candidate countries pose an impediment to improved rail connectivity.
- European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen’s political guidelines as candidate earlier this year included passing a “Single Digital Booking and Ticketing” Regulation, enabling Europeans to buy cross-country rail tickets in a single platform. Commissioner-designate Tzitzikostas has announced he will be putting forward this resolution by 2025<sup>7</sup>.
- YEPP has long been attentive to Europe’s railways, having, in particular, called for the greater geographical coverage of its network, the better interoperability of its timetables and booking platforms, and its increased affordability.<sup>8</sup>

**YEPP calls on:**

- The European Commission to pay particular attention to the cohesion aspect of transport and railway policy and to prioritise the high-speed connection of more peripheral Member States to more centrally located ones.
- The European Commission to strengthen connections, especially high-speed rail, with candidate countries like Ukraine and Moldova, and to quicken the pace of ongoing network extensions to these countries.
- The European Commission to consider additional investment in track gauge standardisation operations.
- The European Commission to prioritise the putting forward of the “Single Digital Booking and Ticketing Regulation”.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ursula von der Leyen, ‘Europe’s Choice: Political Guidelines for the next European Commission’, 18 July 2024, 9, [https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648\\_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029\\_EN.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf); ‘Hearing of Apostolos Tzitzikostas, Commissioner-Designate (Sustainable Transport and Tourism)’.

<sup>8</sup> “Improved European Rail Mobility” Resolution, adopted at the YEPP Council Meeting, Bucharest (Romania), 20th of September of 2022.