



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT

Directorate B - Investment, Innovative & Sustainable Transport
The Director

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MOVE/B/IMazAres(2020)7321894

Mr Mário LOPES
mariolopes@tecnico.ulisboa.pt

Mr Henrique NETO
henriquejosesusaneto@gmail.com

Sent by e-mail only

Dear Mr Lopes,
Dear Mr Neto,

I acknowledge receipt of your third letter to Commissioner Vălean of 18 October 2020. Commissioner Vălean asked me to reply on her behalf.

As a reminder, already written to you in the replies to your previous two letters, interoperability of rail within the Iberian Peninsula and with the rest of the EU is of high importance to the European Commission. Article 39.2.a (iv) of the TEN-T Regulation implies that the new high-speed lines between Lisbon and Madrid, Lisbon and Porto and Aveiro and Salamanca have to be constructed in UIC gauge. This may be achieved through the intermediate step of equipment with polyvalent sleepers and the later shifting to UIC gauge. With the provisions of the TEN-T Regulation, Portugal is not becoming a rail island due to the Iberian gauge and the border crossings with Spain that are part of the core TEN-T network are guaranteeing the interconnection with the rest of the European rail network. The gradual transition from the Iberian gauge to the UIC gauge requires strong coordination between the two countries and the approach currently followed in Portugal is designed to maintain interoperability with Spain. The Commission is fully aware of the investments that are being made in the Portuguese rail network and, given that the most significant works that are underway on the core TEN-T network are co-financed by the Connecting Europe Facility, the fulfilment of all relevant European Regulations is being scrutinised.

Regarding the specific questions and points of your third letter:

- As already explained in the reply to your second letter, the certificate that can be issued by the national notified body under the Interoperability Directive does not imply that the gauge is considered as interoperable with the UIC gauge. It implies that the characteristics of the infrastructure are in line with those of the Technical Specifications for Interoperability relating to Infrastructure i.e. that the rail system of the country allows the safe and uninterrupted movement of trains which accomplish

the required levels of performance. There is therefore no contradiction with EU Regulation 1315/2013 which foresees that the new lines to be built on the TEN-T network must be in UIC gauge. Once again, this may be achieved through the intermediate step of equipment with polyvalent sleepers and the later shifting to UIC gauge. Line upgrades may also be with polyvalent sleepers or third rail.

- Contrary to your statement on that topic, I re-affirm to you that there is strong coordination between Portugal and Spain through, amongst others, their bilateral summits and AVEP.
- The fact that it will take some time to change the position of rails on polyvalent sleepers to go from Iberian to UIC gauge and that this may cause disruptions of traffic especially on single lines, is the case for all rail works, including maintenance works, everywhere in the EU. In many if not all cases, solutions are put in place to minimize or avoid those disruptions (for example, works conducted during the night, traffic diverted on other lines, transshipment to trucks etc.).
- As you very well know, CEF is already co-financing upgrades of Iberian lines on the Atlantic Corridor in Portugal. For the moment those upgrades are realized with polyvalent sleepers in order to maintain interoperability with Spain. From Spain, Iberian gauge trains are transhipped on UIC rolling stock to move the freight to France and further on. The same from France to the Iberian Peninsula. This will disappear when Iberian lines are gradually and in a coordinated way between Portugal and Spain upgraded to UIC gauge and/or when operators will use variable axle gauge rolling stock. In any case, there are no barriers already today to travel or carry by train from the Iberian Peninsula to the rest of Europe and vice-versa and Portugal, Spain and the European Commission will ensure that this continues to be the case.

Yours sincerely,



Herald RUIJTERS