

Dear Ms Adina Valean

Commissioner for Transportation

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**Subject: risk of Isolation of the Portuguese economy – clarification of the rail component of the TEN-T in Portugal**

Dear Commissioner Adina Valean: we would like to thank very much for your 3<sup>rd</sup> answer to our letters, dated 18 November 2020, that Mr Herald Ruijters wrote to us on your behalf.

In this letter we only highlight the main political conclusions (not exhaustive) that can be drawn from your previous letters on the issue referred above, and make some comments on those. Please feel free to do not answer to this letter.

1 – The EU support for the policies of the Portuguese government for the change of the rail gauge is technically and economically ill-founded: on your last letter it is written “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 normal rail works, usually the traffic flows are usually interrupted for only a few hours, as these type of works can be done in small parts of the lines. In some more difficult situations, parts of a double line may have to work as a single line for several days to work on the other track. But in both cases, these short disruptions don’t interrupt the flow of trains for a long time. The works to change the position of the rails from the Iberian to UIC gauge in lines with polyvalent sleepers cannot be done only in small parts of a line, as trains would not be able to circulate along the entire line. The continuous flow of trains will only be possible after the position of the rails is changed in the whole line. Therefore, the line will be out of service not during a few hours, but probably months, because traffic has to be interrupted from the beginning to the end of the works in that line. Depending on the alternatives, in some cases, the economic and

environmental consequences of this long interruptions of rail operations may be unbearable for the economy. Therefore, your comparison of the impact of works to change the rail gauge with other rail works is ill-founded, leading to policies that are creating situations that in the future will be very difficult and expensive to solve.

2 – There is an agreement between the EU Commission and the Member States to finish the railway lines of the EU Core Network (in UIC gauge) until 2030. It is not known in which decade or century that will be done in Portugal, as there this no deadline and calendared plan for that. In fact, regarding the introduction of the UIC gauge in the international lines of the Atlantic Corridor, this is the only result of what you designated on your last letter as “strong coordination between Portugal and Spain”: the only known fact is that the Portuguese government has no intention or investment plan to start the introduction of the UIC gauge in the Portuguese lines of the EU Core Network before 2030 (see Annex 1 of our second letter, dated 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020), the date in which this should be finished. This is incompatible with EU regulation 1315/2013, therefore it is illegal as Portugal has received and it is going to continue to receive CEF Funds for this purpose (we asked this in our previous letter and your letter does not deny it). The EU Commission is perfectly aware of the above.

3 – On your last letter, it is written “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”. The difference of rail gauge is a technical barrier. Even though it does not make it impossible to carry goods by rail between Portugal and the rest of Europe in small quantities (the gauge problem being solved mainly by means of transshipment of containers at the French-Spanish border), it destroys the competitiveness of international rail freight transport from/to Portugal, and therefore isolates the Portuguese economy from its main trade partners (the rest of Europe), condemning the portuguese people to impoverishment. The goal of our letters was to ask to stop the EU support to this policy, not the opposite.

With best regards

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Luis Cabral da Silva, Electrical engineer, former officer at REFER (National Rail Network, actual IP, <https://www.infraestruturasdeportugal.pt/>), specialist in Transports and Rail Infrastructure

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Mário Ribeiro, Mechanical engineer (retired), at TAP in the maintenance service

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