

## *The European Voice of Freight Logistics and Customs Representatives*

Brussels, 6<sup>th</sup> November

### ***BRAVO, M. BARROT!*** **European rail freight-oriented networks: two (rail) tracks in the right direction!**

On 18<sup>th</sup> October 2007, the European Commission unveiled its Communication on a rail freight-oriented network.

Freight forwarders and logistics service providers are important users of rail freight services. CLECAT, who believes that rail can and must play a more substantial role in European freight transport, has always promoted the notion of a liberalised rail freight market, on which full and fair competition take place.

CLECAT has also supported the idea of a European rail freight-oriented network with a view that rail freight cannot be systematically considered the Cinderella of the rail market on each and every rail track. Freight trains should be given priority at least on identified freight oriented networks. As the Communication's title indicates, the EU is willing to work *'towards a rail network giving priority to freight'* and, to this end, the Commission intends to develop measures aimed at tightening rules on priority of international freight in case of disturbance of the network.

The intention of modifying the international allocation of train paths is also to be welcomed, all the more since the Communication opens the possibility for authorised applicants to request paths on the freight-oriented network, a long-standing request from the forwarding sector. Indeed, allowing forwarders and shippers who attain a certain dimension of business to apply for rail slots would not only inject an additional dose of competition, but it would also increase the flexibility of rail freight services, thereby their overall quality and appeal.

Finally, the availability of quality indicators will provide users with the necessary transparency on the level of performance of European rail freight transport, whilst acting as an incentive for operators to improve their performance.

Some may argue that setting up a European rail freight network will be a long and demanding process. By the same token, one could observe that everyone would be quite happy that EU transport problems and issues could be solved by magic. CLECAT however believes that this will be a worthwhile investment and the expected benefits largely justify a strong involvement of stakeholders. CLECAT is therefore willing to make its structure and expertise available, starting with the strategic group, which the Communication plans to set up.

This looks like a promising start: let us take this opportunity to work together to promote a more efficient and appealing rail freight service!