

13 March 2003

THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Dear Ambassador,

UNICE is pleased with the European Parliament's acceptance of the Commission proposals to liberalise the European railway market further. It will allow for open non-discriminatory access for transport companies to slot capacity on the railway network, paving the way for lower costs, better quality, increasing demand and timely innovation. UNICE therefore calls on the EU Member States to fully accept the first reading of the European Parliament in the March Transport Council, without extending the deadline of January 2006.

Already in Gothenburg, the European Council called for a shift from road to rail transport. UNICE stresses that any such modal shift will not occur unless the price/quality ratio of railway services improves significantly. Liberalisation of railway freight transport is crucial for this. It can break the vicious circle of high tariffs, low quality, falling market share, continuing financial losses, postponement of necessary investments and the threat of job losses.

UNICE therefore fully supports the European Parliament and the Commission in their proposal to accelerate the opening-up of the international rail freight market to competition, as well as the inclusion of domestic freight transport. Cabotage in rail freight transport is not only badly needed to stimulate competition in domestic markets, it is also vital to optimise international (especially return) trips, allowing better use of capacity and more competitive prices.

Secondly, UNICE stresses the importance of allowing shippers and forwarders to apply for slot capacity as well. This will reinforce the position of railway customers, providing incentives for railway companies to improve their service quality.

For detailed comments on the second railway package, we refer to the position paper of the European Rail Freight Customers Platform (ERFCP), which you will receive shortly and which is fully endorsed by UNICE, one of its founding members.

I would be grateful if you could arrange for this letter to be brought to the attention of your Minister and experts in charge of this issue. I thank you for the attention you may give to our views.

Yours sincerely,

(original signed by)  
Philippe de Buck