

Brussels, 25.09.2017  
JF /Ares(2017)

**VIOLETA BULC**

Member of the European Commission

To the representatives of the  
European rail logistics

Thank you for your letter of 4 September 2017 expressing the clear concern of sector stakeholders about the impact of the Rastatt blockage on the economy along the Rhine-Alpine corridor, on the modal share of rail freight and on the viability of railway logistics on that corridor. I fully share that concern. Please be assured that the Commission is following closely the consequences of the blockage and is encouraging reinforced coordination between all parties involved.

I have been recently informed that DB Netz, the infrastructure manager responsible for the relevant part of the corridor, has taken quick and strong action in close cooperation with the rail freight operators and other infrastructure managers on the Rhine-Alpine corridor. And I welcome the fact that DB Netz will reopen the tracks near Rastatt on 2 October –5 days earlier than originally expected.

In the meantime, I instructed my services to organise a meeting of the representatives from five infrastructure managers of the Rhine-Alpine freight corridor, sector associations representing rail operators, shippers and combined transport operators and the EU Agency for Railways to discuss possible action at EU level. Such a meeting took place on 12 September. A number of your representatives were able to come, even at short notice.

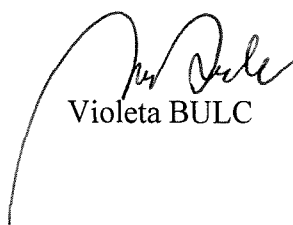
At that meeting, the primary subject for discussion was the contingency plans in the event of a serious traffic disturbance such as the one caused by the Rastatt blockage. But the meeting also looked into the planned date for re-commissioning the blocked section, the dissolution of the transport backlog, obstacles created by language requirements and specific route knowledge, as well as national railway infrastructure development strategies. As regards compensation for operational losses, however, the Commission informed the participants that there was no provision for this at EU level and any national subsidies can only be given in compliance EU State aid rules.

I appreciate the commitment of the railway sector as well as the European rail logistics companies to work together in a pragmatic spirit in these difficult conditions to minimise the negative impacts. I also note all the participants agreed that lessons have to be learnt from the Rastatt blockage.

In particular, the effectiveness of the contingency plans can and should be improved. To that end, the Commission will facilitate an ad hoc working group of the Platform of Rail Infrastructure managers (PRIME) and the Railway Undertakings' Dialogue. The group will also bring in experts from the Rail Freight Corridors and European representatives of the rail logistics sector, including the shipping companies. It will develop a best practice template for contingency plans, which should include procedures to facilitate coordination between infrastructure managers and making timely information available to railway undertakings in case of traffic disruption. We hope that this work will be completed by early 2018 but that some first results could already be presented to the Rail Freight Days which I look forward to attending in Vienna in December this year.

My conclusion is that we can and should do better if we are to safeguard and rebuild a strong market position for rail freight, which is of course absolutely crucial. With better contingency planning and coordination, the sector should be able to reduce the risk and the impact of rail traffic disturbances in the future, although I sincerely hope that we will not see another incident of this magnitude in our lifetime.

Yours faithfully,



Violeta BULC