



4th Global Rail Freight Conference (“GRFC 2014”), organised by the worldwide railway association UIC and Austrian Federal Railways ÖBB, opens in Vienna

(Vienna / Paris, 24 June 2014) The 4th UIC Global Rail Freight Conference (GRFC 2014) jointly organised with Austrian Federal Railways ÖBB opened today in Vienna. This International Conference has become a reference at global level for exchanges on all strategic issues and best practices related to development of rail freight and logistics services across the world.

The 2014 edition of the Global Rail Freight Conference is held under the main theme “Seamless transport chains through harmonisation” and is targeted at all stakeholders and actors involved in the development of rail freight. This worldwide conference brought together delegates from 30 countries from all five continents.

The conference was opened by Christian Kern, CEO of Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB), hosting the event and also Chairman of the CER, the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies. In his address, Mr Kern described the economic perspectives marked by low economic growth forecasts. In this context, the challenges for the Railways “are to be part of the solution to sustain growth and not part of the problem”. [...] “It is a necessity for railways to be the backbone for efficient economy developments in particular through an investment policy”. He also mentioned in this difficult context that railways restructurings brought outstanding results in a number of European countries such as Poland, Germany and Austria. He added that railways can be most optimistic for the future in continuing their strong tradition of innovation.

Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, UIC Director General, warmly thanked the host ÖBB and Rail Cargo Group and underlined: “The aim of the GRFC conference is to develop new ideas and exchange best practice at global level and to stimulate new partnerships between all stakeholders and actors involved. The Global Rail Freight Conference is the place to be every two years for decision-makers from the political, economic, transport and business world.” He insisted that “Perspectives for the development of new long distance freight services have to be considered against the background of other evolutions, mainly demographic, economic, financial evolutions. To summarise, space and finances are no longer available to continue to develop fierce competition between transport modes either on freight. As its main added value, rail transport can provide transport with high capacity over long distances, developing of seamless transport chains through Harmonisation in different fields. In this context interoperability is not enough”. He added: “In business terms, the main challenges for railways are to develop B to C to C business instead of only B to C”.

On behalf of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Mrs Eva Molnar, Director of Transport Division, described the UNECE role as a worldwide centre of transport agreements (58 Transport Conventions ruling Legal aspects). She described the overall economic background for Transport developments (cheap transport, growing gap between poor and rich countries, digitalisation) and the Millennium Development Goals defined by the United Nations.

In her opinion, the main challenges today for rail transport are infrastructure planning, cross-border facilitation, safety issue, and compatible operations. The UNECE action takes the shape of infrastructure agreements (AGC-ACTC), multi-country Master Plans (TER, EATL), global projects connecting continents with the special mention of Euro-Asian links. Relating to rail freight a particular focus has to be put on better connections between ports and hinterlands and the aspect of climate change impacts and more generally sustainable development.

Eva Molnar insisted on the importance of developing synergies between United Nations and International Organisations such as UIC.

François Davenne, Secretary General of the Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF) presented the specific role of OTIF (49 Member States from Morocco to Russia) to harmonise transport law and operation conditions at global level with a special focus on harmonisation between the CIM and SMGS legal systems. OTIF plays an essential role for coordination and interfacing, interfaces between different legal systems, different operation systems, 1435 mm UIC gauge and 1520/1524 mm gauge – as well as interfacing between institutional actors (UNECE, OSJD, European Union).

OTIF provides a level playing field for international freight transport by rail.

More information on the 4th UIC Global Rail Freight Conference will follow.

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