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## Europe on rail – the road to energy efficiency and a low carbon future

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 April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022

 Raul Cazan, Jacob Rohm

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Significant shift to rail in business, leisure travel and freight could become a game changer in reducing greenhouse gas emission. We discussed the potential, challenges as well as the expectations on European rail with Jacob Rohm and Raul Cazan.

Europe on Rail focuses on the European rail system as a means of climate friendly mobility. Jacob Rohm, coordinator for this think tank and NGO network, explained that the European transport policies have focused heavily on cars in the last decade and their investment decisions have increased our hunger for oil. While there has been an increase of aviation in modal share, there is no increase in rail – signifying an untapped potential to steer towards climate-friendly mode of transport. Data shows that people are willing to take trains more often – yet despite the increasing interest, there are a few key challenges that need to be tackled.

One of the challenges is the difficulty in ticketing; finding tickets for an agreeable deal could be a time-consuming and complex task while booking a flight is easy with several platform options. Solutions for an international EU ticketing directive are currently being worked out on a policy level. The second challenge is the unfair distribution of tax burden. While aviation is exempt

from kerosene tax and enjoys millions of free emission allowances, trains pay tax for VAT, electricity and diesel, which also leads to the price disparity between trains and flights in many cases. Furthermore, better governance and coordination across Europe for fair competition and improved services is needed. Making English the standard language for rail operators should be considered, as they are currently required to speak the language of the country where he or she drives, preventing cross-border train operations. Rail involves many layers and players with a long history – and it has a chance to become a winning topic as a climate-friendly mobility for all.

Raul Cazan, president of 2Celcius, described the several contradictory situations rail systems face. In Romania and Bulgaria, there are cases where regional rails are electrified but the actual trains are old and run on diesel. Central Eastern Europe's state-owned companies pose issues from low payment to the speed of freight trains - hindering producers to ship for bigger business cases and casting a shadow on ports like Constanța. The main problems found in European rail is the missing link in the TEN-T (Trans-European Transport) Network, particularly in cross-border sections. Investments in interoperable infrastructure is crucial in achieving comprehen-

siveness. Organisations like Connecting Europe Facility, and Resilience and Recovery Facility are important financial instruments to remove bottlenecks and improve harmonisation in the “last kilometre”, and increase competitiveness in the European rail system. Investments need to be made not in high-profile projects but in smaller but important improvements such as digital coupling for freight trains and the dissolution of the grid’s over-capacity at busy intersections. The European Investment Bank is currently introducing the Green Rail Investment Platform, supporting interoperable rolling stocks, which is important as trains should be able to run on different management systems to cross borders despite the different power modes used in different countries. However, it is also important that funds should be obtained by taxing fossil fuel.

Trains could offer what other transports do not - a moment to enjoy the changing scenery, conversations with other travellers and direct access to city centres to name a few, all the while improving one’s carbon footprint. The war in Ukraine has reminded us that trains are and have always been tied to security issues, as a means to ensure supply lines and routes for refugees. Although there are grave challenges to be overcome, Europe on rail possesses an enormous potential in mitigating climate change and further connecting the European community.



Relevant websites:

<https://www.germanwatch.org/en>

<https://europeanrail.eu/>

<https://2celsius.org/>

<https://www.investigate-europe.eu/en/2021/derailed-europe-railway/>

<https://www.cer.be/>