Rail transport: interoperability of the trans-European conventional rail system

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The committee adopted the report (codecision procedure, first reading) by Gilles SAVARY (PES, F) amending the proposal for a directive on the interoperability of the trans-European conventional rail system. The report noted that the interoperability of rail networks must be seen as a long-term project and that harmonisation could not be achieved quickly. In some cases (for example, gauges and tracks), investment would be required on a vast scale without any reasonably early economic return. Among the large number of amendments adopted, the committee stressed the need for a gradual approach so that rail transport did not suffer from additional economic burdens which would undermine its competitiveness. It also called for an order of priorities and a timetable to be established, so that the work could be phased both technically, by identifying the priority technical specifications for interoperability (TSIs), and geographically, by identifying the priority networks. The committee also wanted the cost benefit analysis process to be given high priority at all stages in the drafting of the TSIs. Some of the amendments were designed to provide better definitions, for example, of the aims of the directive. Other key points raised by the committee were the need to ensure that, in the context of the enlargement process, the applicant countries should be involved from the beginning on a consultative basis in the drawing up of the TSIs and that the scope of interoperability should be defined more broadly so as to include social provisions.