

**Question for written answer E-003023/2019
to the Commission**
Rule 138
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Subject: Possible elimination of competition to provide international rail services due to merger between Thalys and Eurostar

It was announced today that the French railway company SNCF intends to merge Thalys and Eurostar. Eurostar provides rail passenger services from Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris, while Thalys trains run mainly from the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany.¹

The reason for the merger is that the SNCF aspires to enable rail travel to compete with air and car travel. At the same time, this merger will eliminate the fragile competition to provide rail services between the Netherlands, Belgium and England. This week, a Thalys train carrying several hundred passengers interrupted its journey for more than eight hours at a lonely station. Passengers complained about the lack of an emergency plan.² If there is no longer to be a choice between Eurostar and Thalys, it will also be impossible for passengers to opt for a different service provider after receiving poor service from Thalys.

1. How desirable does the Commission consider the merger between Eurostar and Thalys to be from the point of view of competition in international rail services between the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom?
2. What is the Commission's view of the SNCF's move to eliminate competition in the international rail system in order to compete with other modes of transport?
3. In what practical ways will the Commission promote competition in the international rail sector, so that customers can opt for the competitor after receiving poor service?

¹ <https://www.treinreiziger.nl/sncf-wil-fusie-thalys-en-eurostar/>.

² <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/1731715078/gestrande-thalys-na-acht-uur-vertraging-aangekomen>.