



31.10.2018

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition No 0026/2018 by Patricio Oschlies Serrano (Spanish) on the railway line between Canfranc and Oloron

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner is calling for the main railway line through the Pyrenees, between Canfranc in Spain and Oloron in France, to be reopened, enabling products and passengers to travel between Zaragoza and Pau. Reopening this railway line would give Aragon and the central Pyrenees a boost and strengthen connections with France.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 19 April 2018. Information requested from Commission under Rule 216(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 31 October 2018

The Commission is aware of the importance of having good connections in border regions as a key element for the economic development and to improve the quality of living of the population of the area.

The Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament "Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions" adopted on 20 September 2017, highlighted "transport" as a key enabler of exchanges between regions across national borders and announced that the Commission would entrust a study of missing rail links along internal borders. The study has been recently finalised¹ and identifies the referred connection as one of the "potentially most beneficial project" for cross-border railway transport.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/reports/2018/comprehensive-analysis-of-the-existing-cross-border-rail-transport-connections-and-missing-links-on-the-internal-eu-borders

During the last years, the European Union has supported, through several funds, various projects related to the studies and works for the reopening of this railway line. Indeed, in 2016, the section between Oloron and Bedous was reopened and it is now operational. Currently, only 30 kilometres between Bedous and Canfranc are still missing.

Concerning the European Regional Development Fund, the Spain–France-Andorra Cooperation programme (POCTEFA) financed the project "CANFRANEUS" during the programming period 2007-2013 and has selected the project "CANFRANEUS II" to be financed in the current period 2014-2020. In both cases, the actions financed concern preliminary evaluations, socioeconomic studies as well as communication actions. Due to the limited budget of this programme, the support to the railway line cannot involve hard infrastructure or major works.

Under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), studies for rehabilitating the cross-border railway section Pau-Zaragoza (almost EUR 2 million) have been funded. A small Annual Work Programme call for *inter alia* cross-border railway projects is planned for early 2019. Finally, the recent Commission proposal to Parliament and Council on the new CEF¹ specifically mentions as eligible action, cross-border links of the comprehensive network and notably those listed in the Annex of the draft Regulation. The Zaragoza-Pau section is a cross-border link on the comprehensive network and part of it (Huesca-Pau) is included in the list of this Annex.

Conclusion

The political decision to complete the reopening of the line is a joint decision of the two Member States concerned, with the involvement of the administrations at the relevant levels. It is also for those Member States to follow up the project with the support of the European Union.

The EU offers different financing opportunities to support investment projects (European Regional Development Fund, Connecting Europe Facility, European Fund for Strategic Investments, etc.). Member States should analyse the funds or combination of funds that best suit the typology of the investment and apply for the corresponding financial support.

¹ COM (2018) 238 final