

European Union Agency for Railways

Established in 2004, and based in Valenciennes (France), the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA) was set up to build a Single European Railway Area (SERA) and to make rail more effective and competitive. To contribute to these goals, ERA is tasked with enhancing technical compatibility and safety across EU rail systems. The EU's adoption of the technical component of the Fourth Railway Package in April 2016 has expanded ERA's powers, making the Agency a key player in rail security and interoperability.

Context

Over the years, rail networks have developed in the EU with the adoption of different systems and standards. In 2005, the European Commission observed the presence of [more than twenty](#) signalling and speed control systems operating in Europe, making cross-border rail links more complex and costly and rail transport less competitive. To achieve a Single European Railway Area ([SERA](#)), rail technical compatibility – defined as interoperability – is therefore of key importance. To help address this challenge, in 2004 the EU set up [ERA](#), a decentralised regulatory agency, which has a leading role in the implementation of a harmonised EU framework. Like other EU decentralised agencies, ERA was set up to answer to specific policy needs. In 2012, to assess the functioning of decentralised agencies globally and improve their governance, efficiency and accountability, the EU adopted a set of guiding principles, the '[Common approach](#)', followed by an implementation instrument, known as the [Roadmap](#).

After adopting [three rail legislative packages](#) in 2001, 2004 and 2007, the EU adopted the [Fourth Railway Package](#) in 2016, to further contribute to the SERA and make rail safer and more affordable. It comprises extensive reforms related to market liberalisation and governance (the [market pillar](#)) and technical measures (the [technical pillar](#)). The latter describes ERA's role and activities and includes three interlinked legal acts: a new [regulation on ERA](#) and recasts of the [Safety](#) and [Interoperability](#) Directives. By 16 June 2019, Member States had to transpose the technical pillar into national law, transferring responsibilities from their National Safety Agencies (NSAs) to the ERA. This transfer was facilitated by the adoption of [secondary legislative acts](#), most of which concern the [technical pillar](#). By June 2019, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Romania and Slovenia started to work according to the new EU legislation. The remaining countries opted for an extended transposition by June 2020.

Structure and functioning

An EU body with its own legal personality, ERA's Management Board and the Executive Director are its main administrative and management bodies. The former adopts ERA's annual budget and programming document. It appoints the Executive Director (for a five-year term) and the members of the Executive Board, which mainly supports the Management Board's decision-making process. The Management Board is composed of one representative of each Member State and two representatives of the Commission, all with the right to vote, and of one non-voting representative of the following stakeholders: railway undertakings, infrastructure managers, railway industry, trade unions, passengers and freight customers. The [Executive Director](#) is the legal representative of the Agency, who draws up and implements the programming document, establishes an evaluation system of ERA's operational achievements, and concludes cooperation agreements with NSAs. At the end of 2017, ERA employed a total of [164 staff members](#). Under specified conditions, third countries, as is the case for Norway, can participate in ERA's activities.

With the exception of some third countries' contributions, ERA is mainly [financed](#) by the EU budget. The 2014-2020 financial framework made [provision for €182.1 million](#) for the Agency and the budget for 2019 is €26.5 million. The planned expenditure for 2018, as indicated in ERA's programming document for 2019-2021, amounted to roughly [€28.8 million](#). Every year, the Court of Auditors reviews the reliability of ERA's accounts and the legality and regularity of its transactions: the report for 2017 provided a [positive statement](#) on the ERA accounts.

On 26 March 2019, the **European Parliament** granted ERA's Executive Director a [discharge decision](#) in respect of the implementation of the 2017 budget. A number of observations accompanied this decision. With regard to ERA's performance, the Parliament highlighted the Agency's role in ensuring safety and interoperability in EU rail, improving rail competitiveness and the governance of infrastructure. It also underlined ERA's role in the implementation of the European Railway Traffic Management System ([ERTMS](#)).

Objectives and tasks

With the overarching task of improving the efficiency and competitiveness of rail for society at large and contributing to the further development and effective functioning of the SERA, ERA must guarantee a high level of railway [safety and interoperability](#), participating in the implementation of relevant EU legislation. It monitors the development of national rules and can address recommendations to the Commission or to the relevant national authorities to provide technical assistance in its areas of responsibility.

In the area of **rail safety**, ERA develops and monitors a common safety management system for all stakeholders. In this endeavour, ERA can provide recommendations for the drafting and revision of Common Safety Methods ([CSMs](#)). These describe how to fulfil safety levels and targets and comply with other safety requirements. To develop common investigating methods applied to rail accidents, ERA cooperates with National Investigating Bodies (NIBs) and publishes the information provided by them in the [ERAIL database](#). The Agency also assists the Commission in improving the safety of transport of dangerous goods, and helped to set up a [technical framework](#) applicable to railways, roads and inland waterways.

In the field of **interoperability**, ERA provides technical support mainly for questions related to infrastructure, rolling stock and traffic management system. Most importantly, ERA can address recommendations concerning the drafting and revision of the technical specifications for interoperability ([TSIs](#)). The TSIs define the technical and operational standards of all components of the rail system.

The Agency also has responsibilities in **other areas**. With regard to the [ERTMS](#), which enables the control of rail traffic through a single European signalling and communication standard, the Agency plays the role of system authority. It must manage the system changes; ensure, in cooperation with the NSAs, compatibility between ERTMS on-board and trackside systems; and assist the Commission in monitoring ERTMS deployment. Additionally, ERA has to set up, maintain and make publicly available, registers of vehicles, such as the [European Vehicle Register](#), which provides an EU interface for the registration of vehicles and data management. Safe and interoperable rail services rely also on competent staff. Therefore, the Agency, together with the European Commission, develops a common frame of requirements for vocational education, staff competence assessment and certification. These activities also concern the certification scheme for [train drivers](#) in the EU.

From 16 June 2019 onwards, with the technical pillar of the Fourth Railway Package becoming operational, the Agency takes on **new roles and responsibilities**. Indeed, ERA is the entity tasked with authorising rail vehicles for cross-border operations in Europe, issuing single safety certificates and ERTMS trackside approval. The new powers conferred on ERA are expected to increase economies of scale for rail companies, [reduce their costs](#) and project risks. For domestic transport, rail companies can choose between ERA and NSAs for submitting their requests for authorisation or certificates.

On 5 July 2019, ERA delivered its [first vehicle authorisation](#), for 30 freight wagons for operation in all EU countries. As of 24 September 2019, it had [received](#) 172 valid requests for vehicle authorisations, eight valid applications for safety certificates and three initial engagements for ERTMS trackside approval. A new One-Stop Shop (OSS) online tool is now ERA's single-entry point to issue these authorisations and certificates. The OSS features interfaces for dialogue with national NSAs and will gradually be integrated with the Agency's own databases to support the authorisation process. After an application is submitted, ERA appoints a project manager and carries out an assessment process with a dedicated multilingual expert team. If applicants do not agree with ERA's decision, they may ask for a review, and if necessary, lodge an appeal before an independent [board of appeal](#). Finally, ERA also monitors the performance and decision-making of NSAs on behalf of the Commission, through [audits and inspections](#).

