(English version)

Priority question for written answer P-002187/24
to the Commission
Wouter Beke (PPE)
(21 October 2024)

Subject: Reactivation of the Iron Rhine

The reactivation of the Iron Rhine — the freight railway line between Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany — presents an important opportunity for the EU. The Commission stated in 2011 that the Iron Rhine was an intergovernmental issue unless EU interests were at stake. ([1]) In 2024, those interests are highly topical.

The reopening of the Iron Rhine would contribute to climate targets and the EU goal of transporting more freight by rail. It also offers an alternative means to offset the low water levels of the Rhine caused by climate change. The reactivation could also bolster the EU's strategic autonomy as a transport route for LNG or military equipment. The Port of Antwerpen-Bruges is essential for military transport and an important player when it comes to meeting the objective of strengthening the defence sector. This is in line with the Commission's priorities, in the context of which it invested EUR 616 million at the end of 2022 in civil-military dual-use infrastructure.

1. Is the Commission considering reactivating the Iron Rhine and discussing the issue with Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany?

2. Does the Commission have the necessary budget to make this a reality?

3. Can the Commission carry out a study to identify the potential of the Iron Rhine for the EU?

Submitted: 21.10.2024

Answer given by Mr Hoekstra on behalf of the European Commission
(30 November 2024)

1. Missing parts of the railway line of the Iron Rhine project are part of the comprehensive trans-European transport network (TEN-T). In accordance with the TEN-T regulation ([1]), it must be completed by 2050. The Commission shares the opinion that, given the ambition to shift freight from road to more sustainable modes of transport, it would be beneficial to improve the rail hinterland connections to the North Sea ports before that deadline. While contacts have been established with the authorities of the three Member States concerned, the construction of this line requires their explicit agreement and the Commission alone, does not have the power to decide on implementation of the Iron Rhine project.

2. Since the section of the Iron Rhine is on the TEN-T, studies or investments could be eligible for co-funding from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the main programme to finance cross-border projects on the TEN-T. However, the budget of the facility for the current multiannual financial period, including its part dedicated to projects of dual — military/civilian use, is nearly depleted.

3. Studies for the implementation of the Iron Rhine have already been co-financed from the Connecting Europe Facility ([2]) and presented in 2017. The Commission will continue cooperating with the Member States concerned and the interested parties.

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1 [1]Answer to Written Question P-005288/2011.
([1]) Regulation (EU) 2024/1679.
([2]) https://ec.europa.eu/assets/cinea/project_fiches/cef/cef_transport/2014-EU-TM-0407-S.pdf