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Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas
on behalf of the European Commission
(18.12.2024)

The Commission agrees that digitalisation and innovation are crucial for enhancing the competitiveness of rail freight transport. It is for this reason that it referred to Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC) as a game changer for rail freight in its 2023 Communication on Greening Freight Transport¹.

The Commission has already supported the innovation phase of DAC: it has contributed EUR 39.5 million from the Horizon Europe programme² to the activities of the European DAC Delivery Programme run by the Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking³.

The development of a standardised DAC product is progressing well. Efforts now need to focus on ensuring that DAC can be deployed across Europe. Given the complexity and size of the migration from the traditional coupling solutions towards the DAC technology, the Commission supports the initiative launched under the umbrella of Europe's Rail to begin the operation of trains equipped with DAC on certain commercial routes in a pioneer phase as of 2027. This phase will serve to fully explore the efficiency of the DAC technology and provide evidence of its benefits in commercial operations. It will also help finetune the scope of the migration and its timeline.

¹ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c1472590-4276-49b8-9194-8300f6197e2c_en?filename=COM_2023_440.pdf

² https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

³ https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/search-all-eu-institutions-and-bodies/europes-rail-joint-undertaking_en