

Brussels, 15 July 2004

## European Railway Agency starts its work

***The first meeting of the Administrative Board of the European Railway Agency was held in Valenciennes (France) today, 15 July. It marks the birth of this new EU body responsible for improving the safety and interoperability of Europe's railway networks.***

The first meeting of the Administrative Board of the European Railway Agency, bringing together representatives of the 25 Member States, the European Commission and the actors involved (railway companies, infrastructure managers, railway industry, staff representatives, passenger organisations and railway freight customers), has provided a platform for taking the decisions indispensable for the Agency to start its work and draw up its work programme for 2004-2005.

At this first meeting of the Administrative Board, Mr François Lamoureux, Director-General for Energy and Transport at the European Commission, made the following statement: "This Agency which starts its work today here in Valenciennes will be an essential component of the European Union's policy to improve the railway sector. I welcome the active and efficient support lent by the French authorities and all the local actors to ensure that it is successfully established".

The European Railway Agency<sup>1</sup> will be a driving force in Europe's policy on modernising the railway sector. The existence in the 25 Member States of technical rules and national safety rules that are mutually incompatible is a major handicap to the sector's development. It will be the Agency's task to gradually approximate these technical rules and set common safety objectives to be achieved on all European railways. Through its work, the Agency will directly contribute to creating an integrated railway area that is competitive and guarantees a high level of safety.

Breathing new life into the European railway sector, which the European Railway Agency should help to facilitate, is a key element of the EU's common transport policy and should in particular improve the balance between the various modes of transport to the benefit of those that are the most environmentally friendly and guarantee a high level of safety.

The European Council of December 2003 determined that the European Railway Agency would have its seat in Lille/Valenciennes in France. The Agency's offices will be located in Valenciennes while the international meetings conducted by the Agency will be held in Lille. The Agency's Executive Director will be appointed by the Administrative Board at a meeting in autumn 2004<sup>2</sup>. The Agency will be phased in between 2004 and 2006 and should include about one hundred experts by the time it is fully operational.

For more information:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/rail/era/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/rail/era/index_en.htm)

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<sup>1</sup> Set up by Regulation No 881/2004, 29 April 2004 (OJ L 164, 30.04.2004).

<sup>2</sup> The vacancy notice was published in OJ C 181 A, 14.07.2004.