



European Railway Award 2026 Press Release

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European Railway Award 2026 celebrates collective show of commitment from EU countries united in support of rail

Two major contributions to Europe's rail future were honoured at the 19th European Railway Award in Brussels. A unified call from EU countries to deliver tangible progress on high-speed rail took the 2026 Rail Trailblazer Award, while Poland clinched the 2026 Rail Champion Award for their outstanding efforts during their Presidency of the Council of the EU to drive rail forward as a pillar of European competitiveness and resilience.

Jointly organised by the [European Rail Supply Industry Association \(UNIFE\)](#) and the [Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies \(CER\)](#), the 2026 edition took place at a prestigious ceremony at Belgium's Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels.

At the heart of the **Rail Trailblazer initiative** is a **joint letter to the European Commission endorsed by Prime Ministers and Heads of Government, in which the countries urge the EU to accelerate the development of a truly European high-speed rail network**. The collective call to action gave a highly significant boost to the growing political momentum behind high-speed rail expansion in Europe as a lever of enhanced European mobility and economic growth.

The **Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU earned its Rail Champion title** for delivering an exceptionally rich programme for rail. Throughout its term, Poland highlighted rail as a top political priority, giving much needed attention to issues such as innovation and investment. The Presidency's efforts solidified the pivotal role played by European rail transport and industry in boosting European competitiveness and resilience.

The influence of both initiatives could already be seen in the European Commission's High-Speed Rail Plan and Military Mobility Package delivered at the end of 2025, showing the significant impact the countries' contributions have made.

Further to this, CER and UNIFE announced the signing of a joint declaration on behalf of both the European rail supply industry and European railways. The declaration outlines a joint commitment to work together to ensure continued funding, modernising, harmonising and expanding of Europe's rail network. It also touches on the need to reduce the costs of the system, invest in research and innovation, and to ensure that all high-speed rail and military mobility goals are achieved to benefit and better protect citizens across Europe.

Accepting the **2026 Rail Trailblazer Award** on behalf of **countries who partnered on the high-speed rail letter** included **Latvian** Minister of Transport Atis Švinka, **Romanian** Secretary of State at the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure Ionuț-Cristian Săvoiu, **Slovak** State Secretary at the Ministry of Transport Denisa Žiláková, **Estonian** Secretary General of the Ministry of Climate Marten Kokk, **Czech** Deputy Head of the Permanent Representation to the EU Ambassador Štěpán Černý, **Hungarian** Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU Ambassador Katalin Molnár, **Italian** Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU Ambassador Marco Canaparo, **Lithuanian** Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU Ambassador



Robertas Bružilas, and **Spanish** Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU Ambassador Oriol Escalas Nolla.

The Undersecretary of State at the Polish Ministry of Infrastructure Piotr Malepszak accepted the **2026 Rail Champion Award** on behalf of the **Polish Government**.

Further notable figures who took part in proceedings included Alexis Vafaedes, the Cypriot Minister of Transport on behalf of the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the EU; Member of the European Parliament and Vice-Chair of the Committee on Transport and Tourism Sophia Kircher; and European Commission Director-General for Mobility and Transport Magda Kopczyńska.

At the start of the ceremony, there was a dedicated moment of silence for the victims of the train accidents in Spain and the drone attack of the passenger train in Ukraine, where the rail sector, European representatives and policymakers continue to send heartfelt condolences to those who have been affected by the tragedies.

Remarks across the evening outlined the need to keep supporting and celebrating those who contribute every day to ensuring a safe, sustainable and efficient European rail system.

Alan Beroud, CER Chair and CEO of PKP

“Tonight’s awards come at a time when rail sits at the heart of Europe’s strategic choices, from resilience and security to sustainability and competitiveness. The Polish Presidency’s leadership, recognised with the Rail Champion Award, and the collective call of EU countries for a truly European high-speed rail network, honoured with the Rail Trailblazer Award, both show what can be achieved when political will converges in support of rail. Together with industry and policymakers, railways are building the foundations for a stronger, more competitive and connected Europe for generations to come. I am particularly proud that CER and the PKP Office in Brussels got involved and initiated so many important pro-rail activities during the Polish Presidency.”

Michael Peter, UNIFE Chair and CEO of Siemens Mobility

“Poland used its presidency to advance the European rail agenda and strengthen the position of the rail supply industry in an impressive manner. Leading on the competitiveness and simplification agenda, and preparing key initiatives such as the proposals for the new EU budget and the EU military mobility package, Poland has demonstrated true leadership in championing the European Rail Supply Industry.”

“We are united in following this ambition through this rail sector joint declaration which focuses on what the rail sector needs to succeed – including the accelerated roll-out of ERTMS® and lowering the costs of the system.”

Alexis Vafaedes, Minister of Transport of Cyprus

“Cyprus currently presides over the Council of the European Union with the theme “An Autonomous Union, Open to the World” In the transport sector, this means building a stronger, better-connected, and resilient European network that supports people, businesses, and collective security.”

Sophia Kircher, MEP and Vice-Chair of the Committee on Transport and Tourism, European Parliament

“Europe has made progress on rail, but national borders still slow cross-border trains down through outdated practices such as driver changes at borders and gaps in rail infrastructure. The next EU budget must focus on removing these hurdles and turn political promises into real tracks, real connections and real results.”



Magda Kopczyńska, Director-General for Mobility and Transport, European Commission

“Congratulations to the winners of the 2026 European Railway Award! It’s a pleasure to stand with you tonight to honour rail and your work that has helped advance rail across Europe. For the Commission, and for me, our vision for rail in Europe is a seamless, strong, and resilient rail system, where harmonisation delivers safety and lower costs, while competition drives efficiency and affordability. Together, we are making this vision a reality.”

Piotr Malepszak, Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Infrastructure of Poland

“Transport is not only about mobility - it’s about security. The sabotage attacks on Polish railways last year proved that. Under the Polish Presidency, we made security a pillar of a competitive and well-financed European transport system. Today, the Polish approach is setting the direction for Europe’s rail future.”

The European Railway Award, jointly organised by the Association of the European Rail Supply Industry (UNIFE) and the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) celebrates the achievements of inspired individuals whose bright ideas, ingenious innovations and bold policy initiatives have contributed to enhance, grow and strengthen rail today and for the future. First presented in 2007, the event attracts more than 600 guests each year from all over Europe, including high-level politicians and transport stakeholders. The award comes with prize money donated to charity. This year the Ukrainian Red Cross was selected to receive the €10,000 donation.

For further information, please visit www.europeanrailwayaward.eu



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