

BRUSSELS, FEBRUARY 9, 2012

EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL INITIATIVES IN THE STATIONS

Dear Commissioner,

Firstly I would like to thank you for attending this event, which reinforces our belief that the initiatives we are taking to tackle the social problems in the stations are going in the right direction, and are shared at the European level.

The social hardship in the stations is not only a problem of a few nations, due to the economic crisis is also a worldwide phenomenon, present in all major industrialized countries and consequently involves the entire railway. It is also a phenomenon that has a complex basis, independent of the rail sector or the way stations are managed. Stations have, in fact, always been considered by the homeless “the house that they could never have”, a welcoming and safe shelter.

A very strong number, about 80%, of disadvantaged people who regularly live in the stations, are non-EU, mostly from Africa. The Mediterranean crisis has further aggravated the situation, for instance in Italy, which is one of the European countries most exposed to these immigration flows. Just to mention a few numbers, Italy counted 60.000 people landed in Lampedusa island in 2011, compared to 4.000 in 2010. Those people left the reception centres towards Ventimiglia in northern Italy, waiting to cross the border to France, by doing so they literally invaded the railway stations and the railway lines of south of Italy, in some cases causing serious service interruptions. These situations are intolerable from health, humanitarian and security points of view.

Why should the railway companies be responsible for these social problems?

For two fundamental reasons:

- 1) ethical: large public companies have equally large social responsibilities towards the national community;



- 2) economic reason linked to the core business: intervening on social hardship in railway stations means an increased sense of security and improved quality of services;

It is understood that railway companies can not handle the social aspects in the stations by themselves. One of the reasons is that they are not institutionally in charge of it, their mission is fairly different. Therefore, as serious railway companies we can not ignore this problem of social responsibility by plainly responding to the expectations of the customers, the way institutions can not avoid to presiding over these issues under the law by which they were appointed, integrated social policies are needed to put together in a synergistic way the various stakeholders

The *European Charter of Solidarity* was officially founded in Rome in October 2008, thanks to the will of the rail companies of Italy, France, Belgium and Luxembourg. In November 2009 in Brussels the Polish railways joined the agreement as well. On that occasion, the website: *Gare Solidaire* of the European Charter of Solidarity was launched. As support of this initiative, other important associations decided to sign up: the UIC, the Spanish railways foundation FEANTSA, which in Europe is the largest network of associations for the homeless, the Town hall of Paris and the Town hall of Rome. In Italy, the association ANCI and the Community of Sant'Egidio will be signed soon.

Among the primary goals of the *European Charter of Solidarity*, as requested in the Lisbon Treaty, there are the study and exchange of best practices, a very important moment for verification and comparison of the intervention tools that every railway network has undertaken autonomously.

Thanks to this networking, recently it has been possible to offer two specific projects to the European Commission: the **Hope in Station project**, which just ended, and the new **Work in Station project**, which is among the winning projects and will begin in late March.

My wish today is that in the coming months, to the current 12 partners of the *European Charter of Solidarity*, will be added further accessions in the interests of the railway companies and citizens, of the quality of our services, in the value of our customers. We are confident that our efforts will find solid support in the European Commission. Thank you.