

Minister of Justice Antti Häkkänen

Railgate Finland Kouvola China Express route, 10.11.2017

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As of this year, Finland has been an independent nation for one hundred years. Now that we are celebrating the centenary of our independence, it is a good moment to look back and say that railways have always played an important role in building our nation. The history of railway transport in Finland dates back to 1862, when a railway between Helsinki and Hämeenlinna was opened. Easy transport of people and goods has always been the ultimate goal of our efforts to develop our rail network. It can also be said that the growth and development of Finland depended on expanding railway transport.

Today, there are almost 6,000 kilometres of railways in Finland, transporting more than 80 million passengers and 30 million tonnes of goods every year. In other words, we are talking about a huge number of people and a great amount of goods being transported from one place to another by rail. But if we look at this from the angle of the total transport volume in Finland, we can see that the share of railway transport could and, as a matter of fact, should be much higher.

Major global trends, such as digitalisation, automation and sustainable development, are going to have a significant impact also on the logistics and transport services of the future. Transport should be given a key role in our efforts to promote sustainable development, especially when we are simultaneously striving to boost growth and use resources more effectively. One of our greatest challenges is to reduce emissions caused by transport. To this end, a key question facing us as we work to achieve

our environmental objectives is how to increase the supply and demand of sustainable transport modes.

New technologies will take railway transport services to a new growth path. Digitalisation and utilisation of new transport services will produce significant benefits to both society and customers. Transport or, in a wider sense, mobility can be seen more and more as a service in many fields. Today's customers want a reliable, easy-to-use service that is tailored to meet their needs throughout the entire transport chain. From the perspective of our environmental objectives, railway transport services are a highly important part of this logistics chain.

At the moment, the global significance of railways is once again growing. Many actors are looking for environmentally friendly solutions for transporting people and goods, for example to and from Asia. Railway transport is a very competitive solution both environmentally and economically. I am convinced that using modern technology more effectively and improving the flow of information will further enhance the competitiveness of railway transport services in relation to other transport modes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Finnish railway market is facing major changes in the upcoming years. Passenger transport services have been opened to competition on land, sea and air, but not yet on rails. The railway goods market was opened up to competition already ten years ago in 2007, but a lot remains to be done before fully effective competition is evident. To promote competition and ensure the openness of the market, the Government decided in April this year to open all railway transport services to competition. Our aim is to gradually have the passenger transport services on the market by 2026. The goal of the reform is to improve the quality and provision of railway services and to increase openness, the

value of public funding and the share of railways in passenger transport services.

In developing railway transport services, the related logistics also have an important role. Kouvola hosts the biggest railway logistics centre and marshalling yard in Finland. We must ensure that the Kouvola railway and land transport terminal can be developed to meet the increasing demand. This will also have a positive effect on employment, as it will provide a significant number of new jobs in the Kouvola area.

I am extremely pleased with the new route to be opened between Kouvola and China. Goods transport services by rail in Finland, and to and from Russia have already been opened up to competition, and the existing rail network could handle even higher transport volumes. China is the European Union's second most important trade partner, which makes it critically important to develop connections between Europe and China. Also in terms of Finland's imports and exports and international trade, a railway link between Europe and Asia is highly relevant. The new route will enhance the efficiency of transportation and bring a competitive edge to rail transport. I am convinced that this new silk road between Finland and China will prosper and flourish. The railway connection is environmentally friendly, fast and economically very competitive. The route is also an important milestone in the history of connections between our countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the state of Finland, I want to thank the states of Kazakhstan, China and Russia for their excellent cooperation in making this route possible. I also want to offer my sincerest thanks to the city of Kouvola and to Kouvola Innovation for your active and valuable work for creating a link between Europe and Asia.

