Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2020/2168 of 17 December 2020 on the compliance of the joint proposal submitted by the Member States concerned for the extension of the North Sea-Baltic rail freight corridor with Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning a European rail network for competitive freight (notified under document C(2020) 8919) (Only the Czech, Dutch, Estonian, French, German, Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish texts are authentic)

COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2020/2168

of 17 December 2020

on the compliance of the joint proposal submitted by the Member States concerned for the extension of the North Sea-Baltic rail freight corridor with Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning a European rail network for competitive freight

(notified under document C(2020) 8919)

(Only the Czech, Dutch, Estonian, French, German, Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish texts are authentic)

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

Having regard to Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 September 2010 concerning a European rail network for competitive freight[(1)], and in particular Article 5(6) thereof,

Whereas:

(1) In accordance with Article 5(5) of Regulation (EU) No 913/2010, the ministries responsible for rail transport in Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Poland sent the Commission two letters of intent dated 6 December 2019. They included proposals on extension of the North Sea-Baltic rail freight corridor to the Polish-Ukrainian border at Medyka on the one hand, and to the ports of Zeebrugge and Ghent/Terneuzen on the other hand.

(2) The abovementioned Member States had previously proposed to the Commission to extend the North Sea-Baltic rail freight corridor to the Polish-Ukraine border at Medyka. The Commission confirmed the compliance of the proposal with Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 and adopted Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2015/1111[(2)]. However, that Implementing Decision was amended by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2017/178[(3)], which removed the reference to extending the North Sea-Baltic rail freight corridor to Medyka. The amendment reflected the fact that the railway infrastructure between Katowice and Medyka would not be operational before 2020. As the infrastructure is now operational, it is appropriate to consider again the extension of the North Sea-Baltic rail freight corridor to Medyka.

(3) The Commission examined the proposals to extend the North Sea-Baltic rail freight corridor to Medyka and to the ports of Ghent/Terneuzen and Zeebrugge pursuant to Article 5(6) of Regulation (EU) No 913/2010, and considers them to be compliant with Article 5 of that Regulation.

(4) With respect to the extension of the rail freight corridor to Medyka, the considerations laid down in Implementing Decision (EU) 2015/1111 remain valid.

(5) With respect to the extension to the ports of Zeebrugge and Ghent/Terneuzen, the lines proposed for the extension are already part of the North Sea-Mediterranean rail freight corridor. They form part of the trans-European transport network's core network (Antwerp-Ghent-Zeebrugge) and comprehensive network (Ghent-Terneuzen), with key infrastructure requirements such as electrification, 22,5 t axle load, 100 km/h speed and 740 m train length already partially or entirely fulfilled by the existing infrastructure.

(6) The ports of Zeebrugge, Ghent and Terneuzen are the origin or destination of a number of existing regular rail freight services running along the route of North Sea-Baltic rail freight corridor with origins and destinations in Germany, Czechia and Scandinavia (including via the Scandinavian-Mediterranean rail freight corridor). The port of Zeebrugge reported freight train traffic to numerous destinations in the Union, which is underpinned by the fact that one of the port's main commodities is new vehicles. The port authorities of Ghent and Terneuzen have identified also the potential for new rail freight traffic to Schkopau (Germany) and Outokumpu (Finland), as well as to third countries, namely China, passing via Šeštokai, Lithuania.

(7) Moreover, the proposed extension offers the advantage of making the services provided by the existing one-stop shop of the North Sea-Baltic rail freight corridor as referred to in Article 13 of Regulation (EU) No 913/2010, including pre-arranged train paths, available to operators of rail freight corridors serving the ports of Zeebrugge and Ghent/Terneuzen. This will provide more transparency to applicants and it could simplify the process of capacity allocation by removing the need to coordinate some train paths with one-stop shops of other rail freight corridors. The extension to Zeebrugge will provide a direct access to the port, which is an important transhipment point for the automotive industry of all Member States along the corridor, in particular Czechia, Germany and Poland.

(8) The extension will contribute to improving rail freight on the North Sea-Baltic rail freight corridor with interconnections with maritime transport.

(9) In accordance with paragraphs 5 and 6 of Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 913/2010, the assessment of the Commission took into consideration the relevant criteria for extensions of the rail freight corridors laid down in Article 4 thereof.

(10) The measures provided for in this Decision are in accordance with the opinion of the Committee established under Article 62 of Directive 2012/34/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council[4],

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION: