



Resolution 697 (1979)¹

Introduction of automatic coupling on the railways of Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Having regard to the report on the introduction of automatic coupling on the railways of Europe, presented by its Committee on Economic Affairs and Development ([Doc. 4361](#)) ;
2. Noting that the present system for coupling railway wagons and coaches on standard gauge railway lines in Europe has in essence remained without change since the introduction of railways in the nineteenth century, whereas automatic coupling has already been introduced on the railway networks of Japan, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ;
3. Believing that although the manual coupling system has been constantly perfected in Europe, reaching a high degree of efficiency which has steadily reduced accidents to railway staff arising from coupling or uncoupling operations, the introduction of automatic coupling would still further increase the efficiency of rail operations and safety to rail staff ;
4. Having regard to the various studies on the introduction of automatic coupling on the railways of Europe carried out by the International Union of Railways (UIC), which tend to show that, in the present economic circumstances, the considerable cost involved would be out of proportion with the probable results, and would not secure as good a return to the railways as investment in other improvements, such as electrification ;
5. Having regard to the Resolution of 1970, adopted by the Council of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport, concerning the introduction of automatic coupling on the railways of Europe, and to its decision of 1975 that ECMT members could no longer enter into the long-term financial commitments involved, and participate in an inter-state agreement on the introduction of automatic coupling ;
6. Considering that the issue of the introduction of automatic coupling on the railways of Europe is part of a much wider problem arising from the financial deficit of most railway undertakings and the role which governments expect of them as an essential public service ;
7. Considering, further, that rail transport makes substantially more efficient use of energy, is much safer and more economic in land use, and has significant environmental advantages compared with road transport,
8. Stresses the importance of an expanded programme of investment designed to promote rail transport and to restore to health the financial situation of the railway companies in the Council of Europe member states ;
9. Invites its Committee on Economic Affairs and Development to keep this matter under regular review in the context of its periodic reports on the European Conference of Ministers of Transport, to further examine what steps could be taken towards a common basis of financial support for railway services, and to consider whether the rules of competition between rail and other modes of transport, particularly road haulage, are fair ;

1. See [Doc. 4361](#), report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 28 June 1979.



10. Urges the governments of the Council of Europe member states, working in concert, to :
 - 10.1. continue to support the necessary research and tests with a view to introducing automatic coupling on the railways of Europe not later than 1995 ;
 - 10.2. ask their railway companies to continue to purchase only such rolling stock as can subsequently be converted to automatic coupling ;
 - 10.3. give new impetus to the work of the competent international organisations, in particular the European Conference of Ministers of Transport, with a view to elaborating sound European transport policies, in particular by working out objective criteria for the definition of commercial operations and public service obligations of railways.