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The Spanish rail industry – pioneer in technological advances

Spanish rail companies represent a pioneering industry that has become one of the main reference points in many transport projects worldwide due to their expertise and highly developed technological advances.

The Spanish rail industry has experienced significant growth during recent years as a result of the technological advances developed by companies in the sector, the quality of its products and services, and the high qualification of its professionals.

The investment effort in R&D, the productivity of the manufacturers of rolling stock, auxiliary equipments, consulting companies, engineering and service companies, as well as the experience gained with participation in many national and international projects, especially in the last decade, are all basic aspects that have turned railways into one of the key sectors in the Spanish economy, fully competitive in both the internal and the external market.

The progress of this industry has allowed the creation of a very important network of small, medium and large companies, placing this industry at the forefront of the world market, and turning it into one of the biggest employment and investment generators. The strength of the Spanish rail sector in the world is the best example of the great potential of future development and good course to advance toward the change in its growing pattern. Spanish companies represent a pioneering industry, being one of the main reference points in many rail projects for their expertise and highly developed technological advances.

In the international spotlight

The experience acquired by Spanish rail companies within the modernisation plan promoted by the Spanish Ministry of Public Works over the past few years has not gone unnoticed abroad. Many countries have paid attention to the technological innovations developed by our industry, and to the high degree of specialisation of the professionals in the sector.

High-speed, for instance, has positioned Spain as one of the most advanced countries in rail technology. The most modern trains from the biggest manufacturers in the world run on its tracks. The US, Brazil, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam, among others, have shown interest in Spanish developments in this matter for their future transport plans; whereas Turkey, for example, already counts on the expertise of Spanish companies for its high-speed projects.

What we have before us is a very consolidated industry, with state-of-the-art solutions for the 21st century transport and all its fields – latest-generation trains, sophisticated materials, environmentally-friendly components, innovative communication systems and qualified services in engineering or consulting services fields. For all these many reasons, Spain is now a worldwide example – not only in high-speed but also in metropolitan transport, especially in everything concerning technology and performance of urban networks – that is studied throughout the world.

The growth and international expansion are a strong bet for the contribution to the development of rail transport in the world, with technological advances, new products, and pioneering services. The sector's main objectives for the future are greater presence in new projects in emerging countries, and consolidation in markets such as Europe, America and Asia.

The promotion role of associations: MAFEX

The strength of one of the most consolidated sectors in our economy should represent an opportunity to boost its growth in the international market, especially nowadays that national rail projects have been affected by the

economic situation and the decrease in production. In this joint effort towards full internationalisation of the Spanish industry, associations such as MAFEX play a dynamic role and help companies to promote themselves.

MAFEX's main objective is to promote the Spanish rail sector abroad, regardless of their size or activity, so they can benefit from new business opportunities. Therefore, since its origin, the Association has carried out intense promotion work through the organisation of various activities (trade delegations, attendance at exhibitions, training activities, etc). Created in 2004, it currently has 64 members representing more than 70% of the Spanish exports in the rail sector. The companies of the rail sector grouped in MAFEX provide employment to more than 51,000 people, and as recently as 2009, sold technology outside our country for €1.181 million. This last figure only refers to the activity of its associated companies within the own rail sector, and not to others.

Being aware of the big challenge ahead in the upcoming years, MAFEX continues with its dynamic role in the sector through the elaboration of a complete plan of activities, including the joint presence of Spanish companies at InnoTrans. Also, this initiative will be complemented in the following months with new and direct trade delegations to the US, Brazil, and Venezuela, and with attendance to the exhibition Business on Rails (Brazil) and the world congress UIC High Speed (China). These actions aim to promote the image of Spanish companies abroad and to contribute to a better international awareness of their technological capacity, expertise and specialisation – a road that guarantees the future of our industry and its competitiveness worldwide.