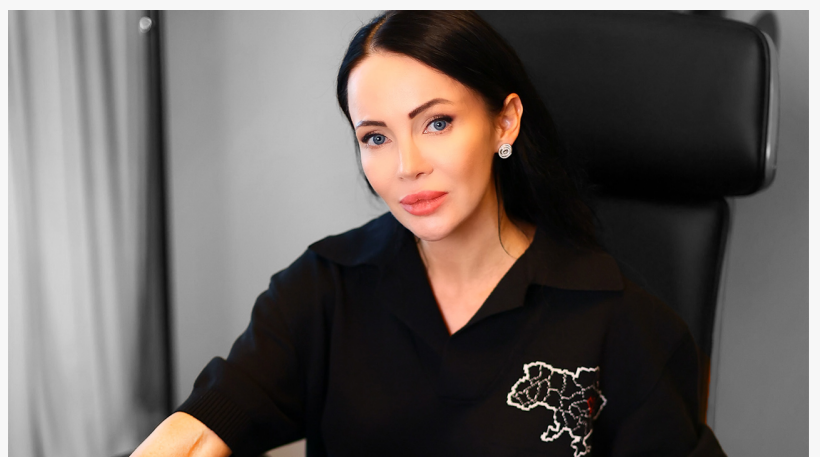


Alona Lebedieva: Why the EU Is Falling Behind on TEN-T and What This Means for Ukraine

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[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- The European Union has effectively acknowledged that the implementation of the core Trans-European Transport Network will require a longer timeframe than originally envisaged in the plans leading up to 2030. According to the conclusions of the European Court of Auditors, this is due to a combination of factors inherent to all large-scale infrastructure projects, including rising construction costs and increasingly



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complex implementation processes amid a volatile economic and security environment. Industry sources reported this, citing relevant European publications.

The audit covered eight major TEN-T transport projects and showed that their actual costs increased by an average of 82% compared to the initial estimates. Importantly, a significant share of this increase occurred after 2020, when the EU economy faced unprecedented inflationary pressure, rising energy prices, higher costs for materials, and labour shortages. By comparison, in 2020 cost overruns stood at 47%, meaning that the subsequent increase reflects not managerial miscalculations but a shift in the macroeconomic environment. The total volume of EU grant financing for these projects reached €15.3 billion, nearly €8 billion of which was allocated after 2020.

Project timelines have also been revised. For five of the audited projects, the average completion horizon shifted from 11 years in 2020 to 17 years in 2025. Such dynamics are typical for transnational infrastructure programmes implemented simultaneously across several jurisdictions. Factors affecting progress included the pandemic, Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, adaptation to new European Commission regulatory requirements, as well as complex technical and legal coordination between participating states.

"The most illustrative example remains Rail Baltica. Over the past six years, the cost of this project has increased by approximately 160%, and its total budget quadrupled between 2017

and 2023 to €23.8 billion. This growth largely reflects Europe-wide inflationary processes, revisions of safety standards, and higher requirements related to military mobility. In 2024, the project received nearly €1.4 billion in additional funding. Nevertheless, the completion of the first phase has been postponed to late 2030 or early 2031, which necessitates a revision of the original timeframes for forming the core TEN-T network," believes Alona Lebedieva, owner of the Ukrainian multi-sector industrial and investment group Aurum Group.

At the same time, Rail Baltica remains a strategically untouchable project. Its importance goes far beyond civilian logistics and is directly linked to security and military mobility considerations. This factor explains why the EU consistently reaffirms its long-term support for the project, even amid a broader reassessment of infrastructure priorities.

"The TEN-T situation clearly demonstrates that the European Union is moving from a phase of large-scale planning to a phase of pragmatic implementation, where resources are concentrated on the most complex and system-forming segments of the network. This is not a rejection of ambitions, but rather their adaptation to new economic and security conditions," Lebedieva is convinced.

For Ukraine, this has direct implications. Shifting timelines and revised budgets in the European segments of the corridors mean that TEN-T projects on Ukrainian territory require a more flexible approach and diversification of funding sources. In this context, the role of international financial institutions is increasing, as they provide support for individual railway and road projects integrated into European transport corridors.

"Ukraine remains connected to Rail Baltica within the North-Baltic Corridor, which several years ago was extended via Lviv and Kyiv toward the Azov Sea coast. This route is considered one of the most promising for Ukraine, given the interest of the Baltic states in the transit of Ukrainian cargo to their ports. Joint technical solutions are already being implemented, particularly those related to integrating different track gauges at border sections," she says.

The Rail Baltica experience has also provided an important technical lesson for the future of Ukraine's railway infrastructure. The idea of fully replacing the broad-gauge railway with the European standard gauge was abandoned as economically too burdensome. Instead, a model of parallel development of two systems was chosen.

"For Ukraine, this means that the European gauge should develop as a tool for high-speed passenger and container transport, while the 1520 mm gauge should remain the backbone for bulk cargo — grain, ore, and other raw materials. This model allows integration into European logistics chains without destroying the existing transport economy," Alona Lebedieva emphasized.

In conclusion, Europe is not abandoning TEN-T but is entering a phase of tougher yet more realistic prioritisation. Infrastructure is increasingly viewed through the lens of security,

resilience, and long-term economic viability. For Ukraine, this means that integration into the European transport network requires an active stance — with clearly defined projects, a coherent technical logic, and an understanding of the new conditions under which the European Union itself is now operating.

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