

Historical background and preconditions for the OSJD foundation

Due to the changing geopolitical situation in Eurasia in the late 1940s and early 1950s and the increased demand for the transportation of passengers and exchange of goods between the Asian and European countries, an urgent need had arisen to establish unified legal, technical, and economic standards for the transportation of passengers and goods by rail in international traffic.

To this end, extensive and large-scale works were carried out prior to the OSJD foundation. As a result, the first basic documents for the international passenger and freight traffic by rail were elaborated and adopted between 1947 and 1951:

- Agreement on the Transportation of Passengers and Baggage by Rail in Direct International Traffic (MPS) and the Service Instruction thereto;
- Agreement on the Transportation of Goods by Rail in Direct International Traffic (MGS) and the Service Instruction thereto;
- Tariff for the carriage of passengers, luggage, and goods-luggage by rail in direct international traffic;
- Uniform transit tariff for the carriage of goods through the countries whose railways are parties to the Agreement on the Transportation of Goods by Rail in Direct International Traffic;
- Rules for the Mutual Use of Wagons in International Traffic (PPW);
- Rules for Accounting to the MPS and MGS Agreements.

These agreements, rules, and tariffs were put into effect on 1 November 1951. The responsibilities for administering the MPS and MGS Agreements were assigned to the Polish State

Railways, which established the MPS-MGS Administration Bureau (BUD), headquartered in Warsaw, to perform these duties.

Some years later, the texts of these agreements, rules, and tariffs were fundamentally amended, and the agreements obtained the new titles: the Agreement on International Passenger Traffic (SMPS) and the Agreement on International Railway Freight Traffic (SMGS). The number of the parties to these Agreements also increased.

Over time, the cooperation between the railways expanded, having covered other areas of railway transport. Passenger and freight traffic volumes also increased significantly.

Furthermore, the need grew for a new structure that would be at a higher international level and meet new requirements, comprehensively covering all aspects of railway transport. Most importantly, this cooperation was expected to be exercised under the direct leadership of the member countries' ministers, who would meet regularly for this purpose at Ministerial Conference sessions.

To meet these requirements, a Ministerial Conference was organised in Sofia, Bulgaria, from 23 till 26 June 1956, attended by the Ministers responsible for railway transport of the following countries: People's Republic of Bulgaria, People's Republic of Hungary, German Democratic Republic, People's Republic of China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolian People's Republic, Polish People's Republic, Romanian People's Republic, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the Czechoslovak Republic. This was the first session of the OSJD's highest governing body, which unanimously resolved to establish the Organisation for Co-Operation between Railways.

As it has been stated in the protocol of the first session of the Ministerial Conference: "The Conference discussed the issues of expanding coordination and cooperation between the railways participating in the Agreements on International Passenger and Freight Traffic (SMPS and SMGS), and considered the information related to the activities of the Technical Commissions on wagon standardization, unification of technical equipment, train traffic regulations and signaling.

Measures to expand scientific and technical cooperation between railways and the exchange of positive operational experience were discussed. Specifically, it was decided to establish direct ties between railway research institutes, hold joint scientific and technical conferences on the most pressing issues affecting railway operations, and jointly publish a technical and economic journal (OSJD Bulletin). The Ministerial Conference session was held in a friendly atmosphere, with the participants expressing complete unanimity in support of further expanding cooperation and mutual assistance in the field of railway transport".

The Railway Transport Committee (subsequently and to this day, the OSJD Committee), headquartered in Warsaw since its inception, was designated as an executive body and depository for all OSJD agreements.

Main OSJD goals, activities, and objectives

Throughout its history, the OSJD in its activities has addressed the achievement of its strategic goal aimed at developing international railway transport, to include the combined and contrailer one, between Europe and Asia, thus facilitating its popularity, competitiveness, and efficiency.

The transport policy of OSJD member countries is aimed at maintaining and strengthening the position of railways in the international transport markets. The provision of foreign trade relations and integration of OSJD railways into the global transport system is ensured by the creation of a common transport space and focusing efforts on addressing not only general issues but also the problems related to individual railway transport routes and corridors, as well as specific border crossing points.

The main areas of OSJD activities include:

- development of international railway traffic between the countries of Europe and Asia, including the combined one;

- cooperation in the field of transport policy, legal and environmental aspects of railway transport;
- improvement and implementation of the Agreement on the International Passenger Traffic (SMPS) and the Agreement on the International Railway Freight Traffic (SMGS);
- updating and improvement of the Agreement on the Rules for the Use of Freight Wagons in International Traffic (PGW), the Agreement on the Rules for the Use of Passenger Coaches in International Traffic (PPW), the Agreement on the International Railway Passenger Tariff (MPT), the Agreement on the Unified Transit Tariff (ETT), the Agreement on the International Railway Transit Tariff (MTT), the Agreement on the Rules for Accounting in International Passenger and Freight Railway Traffic, the Agreement on the Carriage of Containers as Part of Container Trains in International Traffic, the Harmonized Nomenclature of Goods (GNG), technical leaflets and other legal and regulatory documents related to the cross-border transportation;
- elaboration of measures aimed at improving the competitiveness of railways against other modes of transport;
- development of cooperation to improve operating rules, technical specifications, and modernize lines used for international transportation;
- assistance in resolving various issues related to the international cooperation between the OSJD railways;
- collaboration with other international organisations involved in the railway transport and combined transport.

OSJD at a present stage

Today, OSJD unites 30 countries worldwide with a population of over 2 billion people and a territory of approximately 38 million square kilometers. The total length of the OSJD member countries' railways reaches over 300,000 kilometers, with the current transportation volumes amounting to an average of over 5.5 billion passengers and over 4.2 billion tons of goods annually. Over time, the number of OSJD member countries has steadily increased, and in recent years, the Republic of Korea (2018) and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2022) have joined the OSJD, bringing the number of its member countries to the following thirty: Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Albania, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Belarus, Republic of Bulgaria, Hungary, Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, People's Republic of China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Republic of Cuba, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Republic of Latvia, Republic of Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Mongolia, Republic of Poland, Russian Federation, Romania, Slovak Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Republic of Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Republic of Estonia.

Moreover, the OSJD observer status at various times has been held by the German Railway (DB AG), Finnish Railways (VR), and Győr–Sopron–Ebenfurt Railway (GySEV). Currently, this status

applies to the Greek Railways (OSE), Serbian Railways (ZS Holding), French Railways (SNCF Group), as well as the Federal Passenger Company JSC (FPC).

Affiliated enterprises are represented by the companies, institutes, and organisations from the Eurasian countries whose activities are related to the railway transport. As of 1 January 2026, their number is as much as 38.

OSJD governing and working bodies

The OSJD's supreme governing body is the OSJD Ministerial Conference (MC), which considers and makes decisions at the governmental level on all matters related to the OSJD activities.

In 2025, session LII (52) of the OSJD Ministerial Conference was held in Qingdao, People's Republic of China, from 10 till 13 June. In 2026, which is the year of the OSJD's 70th anniversary, session LIII of the Ministerial Conference is scheduled from 9 till 12 June in the Republic of Tajikistan.

Following structural changes in the railway transport systems of a number of the OSJD member countries, and the resulting emergence of railway enterprises as self-contained economic entities, in 1992, at the 20th MC session in Ulan-Bator, Mongolia, a decision was taken to establish another OSJD governing body at the level of railways and railway enterprises – the Conference of General Directors (Authorized Representatives) of OSJD Railways (CGD), which also formulates proposals for further approval by the Ministerial Conference. The CGD meetings are held once a year, as a rule in April. The 40th CGD anniversary meeting is scheduled for 20-24 April 2026 in Kazakhstan.

With the time passing by, the structure of the OSJD working bodies has undergone changes, and currently is represented by **five Commissions and two PWGs**:

- I Commission on Transport Policy and Development Strategy,
- II Commission on Transport Law,
- III Commission on Freight Traffic,
- IV Commission on Passenger Traffic,
- V Commission on Infrastructure and Rolling Stock,
- Permanent Working Group on Coding and Information Technology,
- Permanent Working Group on Finance and Accounting, as well as a number of ad hoc and joint working groups.

The **ad hoc working groups (AWGs)** are represented by:

- AWG on the issues of vocational training/education in the field of railway transport;
- AWG of the OSJD Commission on Transport Policy and Development Strategy on OSJD railway transport statistics;

- AWG of the OSJD Commission on Transport Law in the field of updating the Rules for the Transportation of Dangerous Goods;
- AWG of the OSJD Commission on Transport Law on the development of technical regulations for stowing and fastening of goods;
- AWG of the OSJD Commission on Transport Law on the issues of the document of title to the goods.

Joint working groups with other international organisations include:

- based on the Memorandum of Cooperation between OSJD and ERA, the Contact Group has been established on the subject: “Collaboration between ERA and OSJD on the analysis of the relationship between 1520-mm/1524- mm and 1435-mm rail systems of EU and non-EU states”;
- Joint Working Group (Legal Group) of CIT/ OSJD on CIM/SMGS transport law harmonisation;
- Joint OSJD/UIC Group “Coding and Information Technology”;
- OSJD/UIC Joint Working Group of concerned railway companies in reviewing and converting the OSJD/UIC joint leaflets into draft OSJD/UIC international railway technical solutions (IRS).

OSJD as a bridge in the transcontinental railway network

Unlike transportation conditions in the European countries, the railway connections between the OSJD member countries are characterized by significant lengths of transportation routes (8000-10,000 km) across various climatic zones (including regions with harsh climates), with the track gauges changed twice by the trains running in the same direction (1435 mm/1520 mm/1435 mm). The operational overall length of all OSJD member countries’ railway lines at the time of OSJD’s foundation was approximately 227,000 km, while at present the overall railway length has reached more than 300,000 km.

A large number of the countries with different transport legislation participate in the transportation process between Europe and Asia. The documents developed and adopted within the OSJD framework ensure the creation of a unified legal framework for international railway traffic between the OSJD member countries, requiring improvement and harmonization of transportation conditions, tariffs, customs procedures, rules for the mutual use of wagons, information technology support, financial accounting between railways, and consideration of many other issues. In this regard, OSJD is continuously working to develop the international railway transport, including the container and combined one, between Europe and Asia and to enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of railway transport.

OSJD activities in the past decade

In 2016, during session XLIV of the OSJD Ministerial Conference in Baku, the Organisation celebrated its 60th anniversary. During the session, the work progress achieved in the recent period was summarized and new objectives for the near future were outlined. The implementation of these objectives in 2016-2026 has made it possible to:

- increase the competitiveness and efficiency of railway transport in the OSJD area;
- carry out extensive works towards developing a new Convention on Direct International Railway Traffic, incorporating all the latest trends in railway legal relationship, as well as the SMPS and SMGS Agreements as annexes, and significantly elevating the OSJD's status as an intergovernmental organisation; as part of this work, six sessions of the International Conference for the Adoption of the Convention have been held since November 2016;
- take an active part in the UNECE's work on creating a unified law in the railway sector;
- carry out large-scale works to improve the OSJD railway corridors through monitoring, developing measures and comprehensive plans to better their operation, identifying and eliminating bottlenecks, creating technical and operational passports, and signing memoranda of cooperation in the field of technical, operational, and commercial development along all 13 OSJD corridors;
- conduct analytical works on the development strategy for high-speed and fast-speed passenger and freight trains in the OSJD member countries;
- continue to improve and update the Agreements on International Passenger Traffic (SMPS) and International Freight Railway Traffic (SMGS), as well as the Service Instructions (SI) to SMPS and to SMGS;
- continue works in the field of harmonization of the rules for the transportation of dangerous goods, as well as develop technical regulations for the stowage and securing of goods;
- align the Uniform Transport Tariff (ETT) and the International Transit Tariff (MTT) with the new, improved version of the SMGS Agreement;
- improve and update the Rules for the Use of Freight Wagons (PGW) and Passenger Coaches (PPW) in International Railway Traffic;
- continue to expand the application of the unified CIM/SMGS consignment note within the framework of the joint OSJD/CIT project "CIM/SMGS Transport and Legal Harmonization", to implement its electronic version since 2019 and expand its use; to improve Annex 6 "Guidelines for the CIM/SMGS Consignment Note" to the SMGS Agreement, which jointly will significantly facilitate border crossing procedures by rail, while reducing the time and cost of them;
- work purposefully under the auspices of the UNECE and complete the development of the Convention to Facilitate Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Goods Luggage Carried by Rail;
- successfully complete the large-scale works on the preparation and implementation of Annex No. 9 "Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for International Railway Traffic" to the 1982 International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods;
- complete the development and implementation of the Agreement on the Carriage of Containers as Part of Container Trains in International Traffic, to which more and more railway enterprises are acceding;

- to continue the formation and development of national databases of scientific, technical, and economic information, which in total constitute the OSJD Distributed International Database;
- organise works related to vocational education/training in the field of railway transport and to establish the OSJD Academy;
- carry out extensive works to organise and intensify regular container and contrailer block train services on the OSJD railways, the number of regular routes of which currently amounts to about 300;
- begin joint works with the UPU to organise the transportation of mail by rail;
- resume works on environmental protection in railway transport;
- continue the development and updating of the leaf-lets, which now number over 500, in the areas of passenger traffic, infrastructure, rolling stock, coding and information technology, as well as to continue joint works with the UIC on the updating and migration of the joint leaflets into international technical solutions (IRS);
- conduct active works to implement new digital information interaction systems in international railway traffic and to introduce paperless technologies in the transportation of goods;
- provide assistance in resolving the issues of mutual accounting between railways for international transportation;
- work jointly with the EU to enhance the interoperability of the 1520/1524 and 1435-mm gauge railway systems;
- establish closer and more profitable cooperation with international organisations;
- raise the level of recognition and influence of the Organisation among the OSJD member countries and beyond, OSJD railways, observers and affiliated enterprises and among international organisations.

New contacts have been established in the context of the possible institutional expansion of OSJD, and a number of new initiatives have been undertaken to strengthen international cooperation in railway transport. To this end, OSJD has concluded a number of memoranda of cooperation with other international organisations:

- with the Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission TRACECA for the active development of economic and transport cooperation (June 2024);
- with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, 2025);
- with the World Customs Organisation (WCO, 2025).

These events are an important step towards establishing closer links and sharing cutting-edge technologies, expertise, and available resources. Contacts have also been established with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Challenges for railways and OSJD at present

The Organisation's activities to fulfill its core mission – developing and improving international railway transport between Europe and Asia, enhancing its efficiency and service levels – continues unabated. We are facing a significant expansion of international trade and changes in its geography, the emergence of regions with significant economic growth potential, the erasure of economic boundaries, an increase in container railway traffic between Asia and Europe, and a significant growth rate in Eurasian freight flows by other modes of transport.

The rapid growth of e-commerce opens up tremendous opportunities for the high-speed delivery of small parcel post packages and consolidated cargo not only in containers but also in mail coaches.

The transition to digital technologies in transport and logistics has received new impetus everywhere – from the introduction of electronic transit customs declarations and consignment notes to the implementation of promising projects in such areas as electronic rolling stock exchanges and 'electronic trains' (e-trains).

Today, the entire delivery process of goods by land between Europe and Asia has undergone a qualitative transformation – it is no longer a simple container shipment, but a comprehensive logistics product, with the goods being delivered on schedule and just in time, using 'single-window' technology and fully integrating freightforwarding organisations and 'last-mile' carriers.

Competition is rapidly growing in the Eurasian container transit sector. An increasing number of players as transportation operators appear on the routes between the Asian and European countries.

It means that the Asian and European freight owners have a possibility to choose carriers, and competition leads to an improved service quality.

By performing its activities continuously in a dynamically changing economic and market environment, the OSJD is constantly evolving and improving, ensuring all the necessary legal, regulatory, and technical conditions for the unimpeded movement of passengers and goods by rail between the OSJD member countries.

In the first place, these activities are concentrated at improving, harmonizing, and unifying the legal and regulatory framework, developing railway transport corridors, improving railway tariffs, facilitating border crossing procedures, including the wider implementation of the unified CIM/SMGS consignment note and its electronic version to reduce the time and costs spent for border crossing, developing container, contrailer and combined transport, as well as mail delivery, and much more.

The OSJD has actively collaborated and continues to collaborate in the field of railway transport with many governmental and non-governmental international organisations, such as the UNECE, UNESCAP, EC Mobility Directorate, OTIF, CIT, EAEU, UIC, ERA, CCTT, FIATA, FTE, UPU, WCO, TITR, ECO, CSZT, and others. Cooperation with these organisations has a positive impact

on addressing various aspects in the field of international railway traffic and significantly expands the range of the tasks performed.

The modern global developments present railway transport with ever-increasing challenges, including the increasingly widespread and intensive implementation of digital technologies aimed at improving the quality and speed of customer services, introduction of changes in corridors and directions for passenger and freight traffic due to the evolving geopolitical situation, emergence of new types of rolling stock and energy sources, competition and cooperation with other modes of transport to facilitate and optimize the transportation process, increasing in the demands for improved environmental protection and energy efficiency, and many others. Tackling all these challenges requires closer cooperation between all railways, which is facilitated by their long-standing collaboration within the framework of OSJD.