



Dr Luis Barbero
President and CEO, GATCO

Mr Tom Laursen
Executive Vice President Europe, IFATCA

18th June 2019

The Economist

Dear Editor,

We are contacting you on behalf of GATCO and IFATCA. GATCO is the Guild of Air Traffic Control Officers, which represents 1,600 civil and military air traffic controllers in the UK. IFATCA is the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations and it represents over 50,000 air traffic controllers in 130 countries. The Executive Boards of GATCO and IFATCA have read with interest your article "Losing Control – Air Traffic Control is a Mess" or "A Holding Pattern", as it was titled in the printed edition of The Economist.

While your article paints a mostly accurate picture of the ATC (or Air Traffic Management – ATM) situation around the world in terms of staff/capacity shortages and delays, the root causes are largely missing in your analysis. We also could not fail to notice a certain blame put on the air traffic controllers for the situation we are experiencing. That assessment of the situation could not be further from the truth. It is unfortunate that the investigative journalism required to produce this article has missed the opportunity to talk to all the stakeholders, contrast the different points of view and present a balanced overview of the situation. In particular, we would like to make the following remarks:

- In the European context, your article implies that air traffic controllers oppose to the Single European Sky (SES) based on their opposition to setting performance targets for the industry. Unfortunately, the article is mixing two independent issues. GATCO, IFATCA and other ATC professional organisations have been advocating for the implementation of the SES since its inception 19 years ago. There is written evidence to that end on the GATCO and IFATCA websites.
- What air traffic controllers have been against is the setting of European-wide performance targets focusing on cost-reduction. GATCO, IFATCA and other ATC professional organisations have warned, multiple times, European institutions, Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) and other aviation stakeholders about the risks of implementing short-term measures aiming to reduce cost. The lack of investment

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on staff, combined with the fact that some planned technological solutions to increase staff efficiency have not materialised or have not delivered the promised benefits, explains why the European ATM system has not been able to cope effectively with the increase in air traffic.

- Air traffic controllers, through their professional organisations, have been highlighting for a number of years another main problem in ATM: the lack of technological standards. The development of technology in ATM has taken place mostly in a fragmented way, following the underlying State-specific structure of the ATM system. Our industry has not given enough consideration to the immense benefits interoperability, standardisation and Commercial-Off-The-Shelf (COTS) products can bring to ATM. Just imagine where the mobile communications industry would be now if they had not started working on worldwide standards and interoperability last century.

We could also go into the specific inaccuracies of your article, like the statement that the Maastricht Upper Area Control Centre (MUACC) is the only initiative of the kind in the world (there are other examples in Central America and Africa) or that we are mostly using second world war technology (when, as a matter of fact, bipolar transistors and integrated circuits, both invented after the second world war, are the foundations of current ATM systems), amongst others. All that could have been corrected simply by talking to the ATC and ATM professionals who have the operational knowhow.

In any case, we would like to thank The Economist for bringing the problems and challenges the ATM industry are facing to the fore. It is only by shedding light on the issues that those can be assessed and resolved. It is imperative that the ATM industry learns from past mistakes and develops its full potential. It is only by doing so that the performance and efficiency of worldwide ATM will improve, so the travelling public and other airspace users receive the ATM service they deserve.

Should you have any questions or comments about any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact either GATCO or IFATCA.

Yours sincerely,

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