



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS' ASSOCIATIONS

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IFATCA is calling upon States to safeguard the provision of Air Navigation Services and its critical infrastructure status.

The entire world is experiencing unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtually all industries and businesses have been impacted but the aviation industry has been one of the worst affected, due to the travel restrictions imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19. Air traffic around the world has reduced by 80-90% compared to last year.

Amid this pandemic, Air Traffic Management (ATM) staff and, in particular, air traffic controllers continue to work, keeping our skies safe. They provide an essential service to the medical, humanitarian, military, repatriation and cargo flights still taking place. International organisations, governments, regulators and Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) must ensure continuity of operations while complying with the health and sanitary requirements that this situation demands. They must also provide sufficient financial and regulatory support to the ANSPs to fulfil their mission¹.

The current situation highlights that Air Navigation Services are part of a country's critical infrastructure, playing a key role in the distribution of much-needed medical supplies to address this health crisis. Regrettably, the funding of this critical infrastructure is at risk due to the flawed financing mechanism that includes airspace users wanting to defer the payment of route charges already incurred. This will severely impact both the current and future operation of ANSPs.

Although it is not clear when commercial air traffic will start to recover, it will undoubtedly happen and ANSPs must remain ready to cope safely and efficiently with rising demand. It is paramount that States provide ANSPs and the ATM critical infrastructure with the required financial support throughout this crisis and during the recovery period. IFATCA believes that stopping training, laying off highly qualified staff and/or implementing irreversible cost-reduction measures will delay the recovery of the aviation industry and should be avoided at all cost.

In Europe, all changes in the ATM industry in the last 20 years have been made under the umbrella of the Single European Sky (SES) initiative. The SES has focused almost **exclusively** on cost and capacity even though cost-efficiency cannot be the sole objective of a critical infrastructure. This narrow focus has led to a performance scheme that focusses primarily on the ability to balance cost and capacity. While the scheme is managed by the European Commission, airlines have had a huge influence on the scheme, essentially determining how ANSPs are operated and financed.

¹ The provision of Air Navigation Services (ANS) is a State's task, in accordance with Article 28 of the Chicago Convention. It is a State's task to "provide, in its territory, airports, radio services, meteorological services and other air navigation facilities to facilitate international air navigation, in accordance with the standards and practices recommended or established from time to time, pursuant to this Convention".

- More than 50 Years of Professional Involvement -

IFATCA has been representing air traffic controllers since 1961, with more than 50,000 members in over 130 countries.

With a financing system focussed solely on performance, it is not hard to predict that the current crisis will force ANSPs to again look at stopping training, laying off staff, reducing salaries and, in general, taking short-cuts wherever possible to maintain a minimum level of service. Similar measures taken during the 2008 financial crisis, resulted in grid-locked European skies and **escalating delays and costs**.

While the European Commission and the States are concentrating on how to effectively respond to this crisis, reacting to this threat should not be the sole focus. We must look at this pandemic as a once in a lifetime opportunity. An opportunity to be proactive and anticipate future needs, to evaluate the current mechanisms with a critical eye and to use our experience to avoid repeating past mistakes. Only then will we be able to safeguard the safe, orderly and expeditious flow of air traffic in the face of current and future challenges.

IFATCA is calling upon the European States² to:

1. Recognise that the provision of Air Navigation Services is a critical infrastructure which plays a key role in the resolution of crisis situations.
2. Make sure that the provision of Air Navigation Services is financially supported to overcome this crisis and ensure that sufficient essential qualified staff is available when commercial air traffic returns.
3. Stop the Single European Sky performance scheme until the wider implications of this crisis are fully understood and it is possible to evaluate the suitability or not of the scheme going forward.
4. Implement airspace management measures to enable much-needed coherent and coordinated responses to future crises, be it humanitarian, cyber or financial.

We kindly ask you to involve IFATCA and the key operational staff it represents in the decision-making and the work carried out to address this crisis.

IFATCA is offering to put the experience of its members to develop and support sound solutions to ensure the sustainability of the Safety, continuity and orderly flow of the ATC services in the European Airspace(s).

While waiting for your reply, please accept our kindest regards,



Duncan Auld
President and CEO
IFATCA



Frédéric Deleau
Acting Executive Vice President Europe
IFATCA

² –Austria; Belgium; Bulgaria; Croatia; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Ireland; Italy; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malta; Netherlands; Poland ; Portugal ; Romania; Slovakia ; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden, Norway; Switzerland and UK

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