



European Economic and Social Committee

# The Single European Sky

*"Let us be united in tearing down the remaining walls of self-interest and small-mindedness that are the real stumbling blocks hindering the success of this crucial European integration project."*

Jacek Krawczyk, EESC Vice-President and rapporteur on Single European Sky II+

## Introduction

In 2000, the European Commission unveiled its plan to create a 'Single European Sky' (SES): one unified space for air transport covering the whole of the EU. In 2004, it proposed a package of measures covering everything from passenger safety and cost-efficiency to environmental protection, technical standards and traffic flow management.

The aim was to modernise the way air transport has been handled since the 1960s, to benefit from technological advances, and to enable Europe to cope with rising demand.

The European Economic and Social Committee has actively supported the Single European Sky, adopting opinions in 2002, 2009 and 2011, and exerting a growing influence on EU decision-making.

## Why action is needed

Air transport plays a crucial role in Europe's economy. But the industry is in crisis, with the current economic conditions contributing to airline mergers, bankruptcies and job cuts. Adding to this challenging environment, airlines have in recent years faced rising charges from airports and service providers.

At the same time, air traffic management (ATM) is jealously guarded by a network of national controllers, with 37 different European air navigation service providers (ANSPs) employing 57 000 people. Some ANSPs are five times less cost-efficient than others.

Delays and cancellations due to air traffic congestion are a familiar experience for travellers. The EU estimates that Europe's fragmented airspace is costing EUR 4 billion a year, including 19.4 million minutes of flight delays. On average,

each flight path is 49km longer than it needs to be, generating millions of tonnes of unnecessary carbon dioxide emissions. According to current assumptions, air traffic is expected to double by 2020, and controllers will need to handle up to 50 000 flights a day.

## European Union policy

The first Single European Sky package aimed to use Europe's airspace more efficiently, based on traffic flow rather than national frontiers. But key reform targets were not met. In a bid to speed up progress, the Commission issued the SES II package in 2009, with emphasis on issues like environment, safety and performance. In 2011, in a study entitled 'Time to deliver', it found that Member States were still not doing enough to meet their commitments.

EU Transport Commissioner Siim Kallas is to put forward a new proposal in summer 2013, Single European Sky II+, and has finally threatened Member States with legal action if they fail to implement existing legislation. The EESC has welcomed this tougher stance.

*"The completion of the EU Single European Sky (SES) is an inherent part of the process of improving the competitiveness and growth of the EU economy by further strengthening the European single market. Its objective is to provide better, more effective and reliable conditions of air travel to the European citizens."*

EESC opinion on Single European Sky II+

## The EESC's position

The EESC welcomes the fresh impetus behind the project and has drawn up a new opinion that will feed into the SES II+ proposals. "Our concerns are almost unchanged. Still not enough has been done to let Europe's travelling citizens profit from the benefits of a more efficient coordination among the various transport actors," says EESC Vice-President Jacek Krawczyk, rapporteur for all three opinions. "We simply cannot accept delays and congestion over Europe as an everyday reality."

The EESC has consulted all the stakeholders in the aviation sector through a series of high-level events, including a public hearing on SES II+ in January 2013, and a major conference on extending the single sky beyond EU borders, during the Polish EU Presidency in 2011.

The Committee urges the Commission to:

- take 'top-down' action to implement the SES
- apply penalties for non-compliance
- open up ancillary ATM services to competition
- listen to and involve airspace users
- define objectives that are as much targeting service quality as improvement of efficiency

The Committee calls for strong leadership from the EU itself, and greater commitment from Member States. December 2012 should have been the deadline for creating cross-border Functional Airspace Blocks (FABs), for example, but so far only two are operational. The SES should also extend beyond the EU into neighbouring states: the intergovernmental European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation, Eurocontrol, covers 39 countries. The European Commission should make better use of Eurocontrol's operational role throughout the implementation of the SES. The EESC also stresses the need to safeguard the independence of the EU Performance Review Body (PRB).

A Single European Sky would address all the problems afflicting the EU aviation sector at present, including slot allocation, fuel costs and employment, claims the EESC. The social partners – trade unions and employers – need to be closely involved

in issues like staff training and open reporting, to ensure passenger safety, as well as discussing ways to safeguard jobs in the wider EU aviation industry. Cost savings should not be borne solely by workers. "Effective ongoing social dialogue is essential to help the transition process," points out the opinion. This dialogue should, as a consequence, look beyond the pure ATM sector and be open to the participation of other social partners apart from ANSP representatives. It should extend its scope to discussing the social consequences for workers in air traffic control as well as in the wider EU aviation industry, and ways of safeguarding jobs.

## Too important to fail

The EESC has been active in support of air passengers' rights, and better airline performance should bring benefits like shorter flying times and greater punctuality. The Committee also wants to see more quality and efficiency in ancillary ATM operations such as meteorological services and communication navigation surveillance, and proposes considering opening them up to competition and market forces.

SESAR (Single European Sky ATM Research) is the technological element of the SES: building the future European air traffic management system. In the long run it could create some 320 000 jobs and EUR 419 billion worth of extra GDP. As SESAR faces many complex challenges, it requires major investment and a strong governance model, where manufacturers should not be involved in the deployment in order to avoid conflicts of interest.

The EESC sees a single airspace as indispensable to the smooth running of the internal market. "It is intolerable that one of the biggest businesses in Europe is still fragmented," says Mr Krawczyk.

Without defragmentation, there is a real danger of global competitors moving in and taking control of Europe's airspace, with the loss of even more jobs. "European aviation as a whole is at stake," he warns. "The Single European Sky is the only way to guarantee its future. It is too important to fail."

### Further information:

- **EESC:** [www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.search&q=single+european+sky](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.search&q=single+european+sky)  
[www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-single-eu-sky-ii](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-single-eu-sky-ii)
- **European Commission – Single European Sky:** [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/single\\_european\\_sky](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/single_european_sky)
- **Eurocontrol:** [www.eurocontrol.int](http://www.eurocontrol.int)
- **SESAR Joint Undertaking:** [www.sesarju.eu](http://www.sesarju.eu)