Single European Sky: MEPs lead the way to shorter, safer and cheaper flights

European aviation will be governed by more efficient rules, leading to shorter flights, fewer delays and reduced fuel consumption, thanks to the adoption today by the European Parliament of the "Single European Sky II" legislation.

SES II is a package of regulations aiming to improve the performance of the European aviation system in key areas such as safety, capacity, flight, cost efficiency and environmental sustainability, through the coordination and supervision of Member States' air traffic and the implementation of common rules and performance targets.

Two regulations revising the existing Single European Sky legislation and negotiated for Parliament by Marian-Jean Marinescu (EPP-ED, RO) were approved by MEPs in Strasbourg today, after an agreement was reached last week between EU transport ministers. The regulations provide for a whole series of improvements to the aviation sector, including the following measures.

**Binding targets for performance and sustainability of Europe's aviation system**

Performance schemes for air navigation services, using criteria based on International Civil Aviation Organization policies, will be introduced through national or regional plans subject to consultation with stakeholders. Member States must use incentives and sanctions to prompt air navigation service providers to meet the targets. Independent national supervisory bodies will be appointed by Members States to ensure safety and performance standards are met.

**Functional Airspace Blocks** (FABs) are a key development. International flights currently have to pass through national air traffic control zones or "blocks", being handed over from one national authority to another. This system leads to bottlenecks and delays, forcing aircraft to consume more fuel and jeopardising safety.

An important feature of the first Single Sky package was supposed to be the introduction of FABs, cutting across national frontiers to enable air traffic controllers to manage flights in a more rational way. Around nine European FABs have so far been designed - including a single UK-Ireland zone - but it is felt that insufficient progress has been made.

The new regulation will give a fresh impetus to this project by stipulating that FABs must be established no later than three years after entry into force of the regulation (i.e. by June 2012). A coordinator will be appointed to facilitate the implementation of, and the merger between, the blocks. Funding will be made available from the Trans-European Network programme and the European Investment Bank and from the inclusion of aviation in the Emissions Trading Scheme.
Safety of aerodromes, air traffic management and air navigation services

The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), which was set up by a 2002 regulation, was originally limited to ensuring the airworthiness and environmental compatibility of aircraft but its mandate was progressively extended to cover all other fields of aviation safety. It is now the key player of the EU's aviation safety strategy, responsible for preparing regulation in the sector and ensuring its implementation by Member States.

Under the new regulation on aviation safety, EASA's powers will be extended to ensure precise, uniform and binding rules for airport safety, air traffic management and air navigation services. EASA will establish harmonised rules on Air Traffic Management (ATM) systems and Air Navigation Services (ANS), to improve aviation safety in a context of sharply rising traffic and increasing numbers of air routes.

The regulation states that all "aerodromes" (a term which covers all airports, airfields etc.) that are open to the public and serve commercial flights are subject to Community law. It lays down rules on infrastructure, equipment, management and aerodrome surroundings. Aerodrome operators will have to meet these requirements to receive certification by the national aviation authorities. EASA will define the detailed requirements for certification and carry out audits and inspections.

Existing airport permits will not be affected. Military aerodromes and very small airports - with runways that are shorter than 800 metres - will be excluded. Member States may also choose to exclude airports that carry fewer than 10,000 passengers per year.

Background

The first SES legislation was adopted in 2000. Nine years later, the EU has 27 Member States and the European aviation market has extended to 37 countries. Increasing amounts of traffic are giving rise to safety, environmental, and organisational challenges. Aviation traffic in Europe is expected to double by 2020.

Further action at Community level is therefore needed to ensure a harmonised system where efficiency is maximised, reducing delays and congestion, thereby leading to lower fuel consumption and overall flight costs.

The measures provided for in SES II are targeted to help the industry meet these challenges. The benefits for the aviation industry are estimated at €2 to 3 billion over the next 10 years. Sixteen million tonnes of CO2 emissions should be cut as a result of reduced flight times.

EU transport ministers are expected to approve the legislation at the end of March. The regulations will enter into force 20 days after their publication in the Official Journal, i.e. before the summer.

"Performance and sustainability of the European aviation system" : 614 in favour, 47 against and 24 abstentions.

"Aerodromes, air traffic management and air navigation services" : 662 votes in favour, 20 against and 11 abstentions.

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