



## Questions and Answers – Single European Sky: for an efficient and sustainable air traffic management

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### **1. The aviation industry is in crisis because of the impact of COVID-19 on travelling. Is this the best moment to propose this reform?**

Air traffic management (ATM) in Europe needs to be reformed to cope with both the sustained air traffic growth over the last decade and with significant, unforeseen traffic variations such as those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This requires regulatory changes that promote a safe, cost- and flight-efficient European ATM system that will support the measures outlined in the European Green Deal and reduce aviation emissions. Once the pandemic is contained, it will be even more crucial to increase resilience, scalability and sustainability in the management of manned and unmanned air traffic.

### **2. How will this reform contribute to the European Green deal?**

The European Green Deal proposed by the Commission in December 2019 identifies the Single European Sky (SES) as one of the key measures to “help achieve significant reductions in aviation emissions”. To ensure the sustainable development of the sector, the Single European Sky reform will stimulate a more flexible and scalable provision of air navigation services. Compared to optimal trajectories, current trajectories of all flights controlled in the European region in 2019 entail an additional 6% in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This corresponds to 11.6 Mt of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that could have been avoided. In addition, extraordinary measures taken in 2018 and 2019 during the capacity crisis requiring the re-routing of many flights increased emissions, meaning that the total avoidable emissions could reach 10%.

Today's proposal encourages better flight efficiency, which will reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions during most, if not all, flight phases, for example by implementing a continuous descent approach. Enabling direct routing - compared to zig-zagging through different blocks of airspaces along a route or, even worse, aircraft having to fly at lower altitudes and thus burning more fuel - remains the most effective of the proposed network reforms. The Network Manager will have a strengthened coordination role to pursue this goal.

### **3. The 2013 proposal was blocked for many years in the institutional arena. Why was this?**

The Commission adopted the original proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of the Single European Sky (SES2+) on 11 June 2013. The Transport (TTE) Council agreed on its position on 3 December 2014. Negotiations between the Council, European Parliament and the European Commission began in 2015, but quickly stalled.

A key reason for the stalling of discussions was the disagreement between the United Kingdom and Spain over the status of the Gibraltar airport. Following Brexit, this obstacle no longer exists.

### **4. This updated reform of SES comes 7 years after the last proposal. Have the main objectives of the proposal stayed the same?**

The changes the Commission proposes pursue the same objectives as those of the 2013 SES2+ proposal: air traffic management should deliver a safe network that avoids unnecessary delays and emissions, in a cost-efficient manner. Where necessary, the proposal adopted today suggests changes to the current measures and rules. The preferred options from the 2013 impact assessment remain largely unaltered, while some have been updated to reflect new priorities and changes in the aviation sector. The Commission Staff Working Document presents evidence to support the proposed changes.

### **5. What are the most important adjustments compared to the 2013 proposal?**

The most important adjustments are the following:

- Common information services will support the safe handling of unmanned air traffic, using the

same data as for manned traffic.

- Air navigation charges will be modulated according to the environmental footprint of the airspace user. The charges would be calculated bearing in mind that if direct routes had been taken in 2019, at least 6% of the sector's emissions could have been avoided.
- One of the most contentious points of the 2013 proposal was the so-called vertical unbundling of air navigation service providers. The current proposal allows air traffic service providers (monopolistic providers) to procure air navigation services necessary to control air traffic, in particular data services. The purchase of such data on a European data market, rather than having all air navigation services producing the data themselves, is expected to reduce costs (see also point 7). In return, only the air navigation services that are not provided under market conditions would be subject to economic regulation, and have their costs and service quality levels scrutinised.
- No longer the European Commission, but a professional European economic regulator will review the performance of *en-route* services by . To reduce the administrative burden, this new body will be integrated into EASA, but with a clear delineation from EASA's other tasks. Strengthened national supervisory authorities will be in charge of the performance review for terminal services instead of the Commission, as is the case today.
- The mandatory use of functional airspace blocks would be ended and the regional cooperation between air navigation service providers would be centrally steered. Better network management, combined with effective economic regulation, is expected to incentivise cooperation within the network.
- The Network Manager (currently Eurocontrol until 2029) will become more important in managing the modernisation of the ATM infrastructure. Air navigation service providers will have to deliver the capacity announced in their Network Operations Plan. All stakeholders, airlines, airports and air navigation service providers will have to act jointly in the interest of the network. The same should also apply to the military, except when defence or security needs prevail.

#### **6. The SES2+ proposal in 2013 included a provision for mandatory vertical unbundling of support services for ATM. Is this requirement carried over in this update?**

The mandatory vertical unbundling of support services for ATM has been replaced by the voluntary decoupling of en route air traffic services from other air navigation services, such as air traffic data services, communication, navigation and surveillance services, aeronautical information services, meteorological services, as well as terminal air traffic services.

The air traffic service providers will decide whether to procure those other services under market conditions. If they do, these procured services will not be subject to economic regulation. As regards terminal air traffic services, the choice lies with airport operators, subject to a prior decision of the Member State to allow this procurement in the case of services for 'approach control'. Providers can therefore decide to continue providing all the services in an integrated manner, but cannot prevent other providers from offering competing services.

This will be possible by making operational data available to other providers at a low cost, enabling cross-border data services and competition on a European market for data service provision. Ultimately, this market would allow building a 'capacity on demand', i.e. a more flexible provision of monopolistic air traffic services. The introduction of a market for data services will trigger cost reductions as of 2030.

#### **7. This reform integrates the Performance Review Body into EASA. How will this impact relations with national economic regulators?**

The role of the Performance Review Body (PRB) is linked to the performance scheme. This scheme changes in several aspects compared to the existing rules.

Firstly, the responsibility to draft and submit the performance plans on meeting mandatory performance targets shifts from the national supervisory authorities to the air traffic service providers. As a result, each air traffic service provider drafts its own plan. This plan includes the estimated costs for all air navigation services provided during a reference period for which the Commission will initially set Union-wide performance targets.

Secondly, the performance plans will no longer be submitted to the Commission, as is the practice today, but rather to the PRB or to the national supervisory authority.

The PRB assesses and approves the performance plans for *en route* air navigation services. The national supervisory authorities assess and approve the performance plans for terminal air navigation services.

Air traffic service providers providing both types of services would therefore have to submit two separate performance plans.

This means that the PRB and national economic regulators will have a new distribution of tasks. They should also closely cooperate within the new Advisory Board for Performance Review to facilitate exchanges on methods and best practices. If a Member State wishes, it will be able to empower the PRB to act also as a regulator for terminal services. This option already exists in areas where EASA is the aviation safety regulator.

Ultimately, the reform will open up further opportunities for appeals against decisions by the economic regulators.

### **8. One of the main concepts in the reform is strengthening the European network. How will this be achieved?**

Several reports and recommendations have concluded that the interests of the network should be central when managing airspace (air traffic control capacity and ATM infrastructure) in Europe today.

In the summers of 2018 and 2019, when delays negatively affected large parts of the network, the Network Manager developed a number of measures to address the 'capacity crisis'. This experience showed the essential role played by the Network Manager, but also the need to strengthen its coordination function, and to ensure that the interests of the network prevail in both day-to-day and crisis management.

To enhance coordination in Europe, new functions such as optimising airspace design and air traffic flow and capacity management have been added to the Network Manager's responsibilities.

### **9. Common information services for drones have been added in SES2+. Why?**

The SES ecosystem has evolved since the beginning of the initiative in 2004. The new users of the airspace are unmanned aircraft, and their safe operation beyond line of sight represents a significant challenge for the system. Drones are already delivering innovative services. However, the rising number of unmanned aircraft system (UAS) operations poses safety and airspace integration issues. There is a need to develop a robust regulatory framework to ensure safe UAS traffic management. At the same time unmanned aircraft should be able to safely operate within the existing air traffic environment in a harmonised way across the European airspace.

The amended proposal addresses the pricing aspects for common information services (CIS) to enable automated UAS traffic services. The CIS include information about manned aircraft in the U-space, using operational data that is normally held by air navigation service providers that have to make these data available at marginal cost.

### **10. Has anything changed as regards safety? The performance scheme no longer foresees targets on safety. Why?**

With the adoption of the EASA Basic Regulation in 2018, a number of points from the original proposal related to safety had become redundant. This is the case, for example, for the safety certification process for air navigation service providers.

Given that safety oversight is done by EASA or by national competent authorities, having targets for safety within the performance scheme is also considered redundant. However, this is not prejudicial to safety: the authorities in charge of safety will need to check that air traffic service providers' performance plans comply with safety rules. In addition, the performance scheme will continue to monitor safety indicators.

### **For More Information**

Press release: [Single European Sky: for a more sustainable and resilient air traffic management](#)

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