



## Press Release

Luxembourg, 30 November 2017

### Single European Sky: a changed culture but still a fragmented airspace, say EU Auditors

The Single European Sky (SES) initiative to improve air traffic management across the EU addressed a clear need and has led to a greater culture of efficiency. However, European airspace management remains fragmented and the SES as a concept has not yet been realised, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. EU funding for the technological elements of SES has so far reached € 730 million and is due to grow to € 3.8 billion by 2020.

To examine the initiative, the auditors visited government departments, air navigation service providers and national supervisors in five Member States (Spain, France, Hungary, Sweden and the United Kingdom), as well as key policy, operational and industrial stakeholders. They found that the SES was justified because European air traffic management was hindered by national monopolies and fragmentation. The policy is coherent and targets those shortcomings. However, changes in traffic patterns mean that the high-level goals established at the outset have become partly unachievable and partly irrelevant.

*“Air transport is an important component of the EU internal market, promoting the mobility of persons and goods while propelling economic growth”, said George Pufan, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. “But the single market in Europe clearly does not yet enjoy the benefits of a single sky.”*

Navigation charges have not been substantially reduced and air traffic delays have started to increase again, say the auditors. Current functional airspace blocks essentially provide a forum for cooperation between neighbouring stakeholders, but they have proved ineffective at targeting fragmentation in airspace management, service provision and procurement. Oversight by national supervisory authorities is hampered by the fact that they are not always fully independent and, in some cases, do not have the necessary resources.

The auditors note that reaching agreement on performance targets between the Commission and Member States has proved difficult, particularly in the areas of capacity and cost-efficiency.

*The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report by the European Court of Auditors. The full report is on [www.eca.europa.eu](http://www.eca.europa.eu).*

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In addition, some indicators do not capture relevant aspects of performance.

The technological pillar of the SES - the SESAR project - has transformed a previously fragmented R&D environment into a coordinated one. However, the EU's role in the project has evolved since its inception in terms of scope, timeframe and financial magnitude, all of which have been significantly extended. Performance ambitions were re-set for 2035, not 2020 as originally envisaged.

The auditors make a number of recommendations to the European Commission with a view to making the SES more effective:

- review the SES high-level goals;
- analyse other options for reducing fragmentation and prioritise R&D solutions that address the problem;
- ensure that national supervisory authorities are fully independent;
- streamline the performance scheme and review some of its key indicators;
- review the EU support structure for R&D in the light of the SES objectives;
- reinforce the accountability of the SESAR Joint Undertaking.

### Notes to Editors

Some 920 million passengers and 15 million tonnes of freight departed from or arrived at EU airports in 2015. In the same year, Europe's skies were used by almost 10 million commercial flights. The safe and efficient flow of such traffic requires the intervention of air traffic management, which comprises three essential functions: ensuring separation between aircraft; balancing the provision of air traffic management with demand for flights; and providing aeronautical information to airspace users.

Although inherently international in nature, air traffic has traditionally been managed at national level in a fragmented and monopolistic environment. These features have contributed to delays and higher traffic-management costs borne by airspace users. The SES initiative therefore aims to improve the overall performance of air traffic management by moving a number of responsibilities from intergovernmental to European Union level.

The SES initiative was formally launched in 2004 and gradually established a regulatory framework, comprising a set of EU-wide rules on air traffic safety, service provision, airspace management and interoperability within the network. That framework is coupled with a technological modernisation programme - the SESAR project - backed by financial incentives.

Special Report No 18/2017: "Single European Sky: a changed culture but not a single sky" is available on the ECA's website ([www.eca.europa.eu](http://www.eca.europa.eu)) in 23 EU languages.