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## **- Press release -**

### **The Professional Staff Organisations warn the public:**

## **Expect Delays due to shortage of operational staff!**

EUROCONTROL published their latest forecast for the European flight movements for 2021 – 2027. It foresees that recovery to 2019 traffic levels in Europe could occur as early as 2023, if not during summer 2022.

Provided this prediction is met or just nearly met, the Professional Staff Organisations (PSOs) expect that the travelling passenger will see delays exceeding the 2018/2019 levels, where record delays reached an average of 1,75 minutes per flight. In comparison, the EU wide target was 0,5 minutes per flight. Passengers' experience over the European Network will be seriously degraded.

Indeed, historically, the reactions of the Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) to economic pressure have been to stop recruitment and training of operational personnel, to send active personnel into early retirement, or even to let personnel go. The COVID crisis was of course no exception: Some ANSPs have reduced their operational staff by up to 15% - some even terminated the training of dozens of trainees a few weeks before their qualification.

The delay figures from 2018/19 were a direct consequence of how ANSPs reacted during the financial crisis a decade earlier. Undoubtedly, under pressure from the airline operators, the States and the EU Commission, while only focussing on cutting costs, have failed to encourage ANSPs to use the downturn in traffic to properly prepare their staffing for the moment traffic returned. It seems that there is collective amnesia when it comes to recognising that the main reason for the ATM systems problems is staff shortage at all levels, whether it be Air Traffic Controllers (ATCOs), Air Traffic Safety Electronics Personnel (ATSEP), Flight Information Service Officers (FISOs), Aeronautical Information Service Officers (AIM/AIS) or Supervisors.

As the PSOs have highlighted several times, the focus of the Single European Sky (SES) has become based on a short-term vision: an overemphasis on short-term gains, especially on staffing costs, and gambling that technology and liberalisation will eventually solve all the problems and challenges of the future. In addition, it chooses to sustain a financial mechanism that is wholly unfit for traffic fluctuations.

1) SESAR is the research program for the Single European Sky



The SES strategy has not paid off over the past 20 years. Unfortunately, it also seems that there is no light at the end of the tunnel. The SESAR1) research goals have recently shifted from 2020 to 2035.

Until then, the only mitigation to ensure sufficient capacity is to have enough operational and competent staff.

The mentioned short-term policy also ignores the substantial environmental impact of delay: airlines will file longer routes to avoid airspace congested and subject to restrictions probably mainly caused by understaffing. In extreme cases, these aircraft will also be instructed to hold in the air before landing at their destination. It will cause unnecessary CO2 emissions from the aviation sector with negative consequences on the environment.

Following the plans defended by the European Commission will result in a lack of capacity, meaning further delays, more CO2 emissions and costs on airlines, airports, consumers and ANSPs.

The PSOs have a unique perspective of Europe's ATM operations, and are in a position to provide feedback at all levels to the EU institutions, Member States, Air Operators and ANSP employers.

The PSOs have repeatedly warned that the existing approach of SES will not improve the capacity of operation of Europe's ATM system.

We continue to call for stronger engagement from the Commission to get to real solutions.

Ignoring the input of front-end users will prove to be unfortunate for our industry, the passengers and ultimately the European citizens. It is a short-sighted and non-efficient approach with costly and long lasting consequences.

There is no silver bullet solution to increase the ATM system's capacity. It's a multi-faceted and incremental process that, until further notice, relies on humans to make it work safely, efficiently and provide a solid European ATM infrastructure.

Yours sincerely,

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For **ETF**, Gauthier Sturtzer, ETF- ATM President

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