



RYANAIR

Ryanair Dublin Office
Airside Business Park
Swords
County Dublin
Ireland
Telephone: +353 1 945 1212
Website: www.ryanair.com

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Open Letter

Ms Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels

Sent by email: ec-president-vdl@ec.europa.eu

Dear Ursula

As you will be aware, last week saw the latest 2 days of recreational French ATC strikes, during which more than 1,500 flights, and travel plans of more than 270,000 EU citizens were cancelled, solely because French Air Traffic Controllers invented baseless excuses about "*old equipment*" and "*short staffing*", so they could strike, yet again, in peak Summer. This is the latest example of French ATC recreational striking during June, July and August, which has become an annual event.

90% of these flight cancellations, and more than 240,000 EU passengers would not have had their flights cancelled, if you and the European Commission had defended Europe's single market, by protecting overflights over France. It is unacceptable that every year, the Commission washes its hands of responsibility for Europe's single market for air travel, by claiming that ATC is a "*national competence*". Meanwhile, the Spanish, the Italians and the Greeks protect overflights during national ATC strikes, but the French cancel the overflights.

It is unacceptable, that over your 6 years as President of the European Commission, you have taken zero action to defend the single market, or to protect overflights during national ATC strikes. Why for example should flights between Germany and Spain, or flights between Sweden and Portugal, or between Ireland and Italy be cancelled, simply because there is a French ATC strike?

The solution to this matter is simple: It is up to you as President of the European Commission to take action to protect the single market, as you did during the Brexit negotiations. The Commission can and must insist, that France protects overflights during national ATC strikes, or the EU must step in and allow Eurocontrol to manage these overflights. Your failure over 6 years to do so is indefensible and inexcusable.

If you as the President of the EU Commission are not willing to defend and protect the single market for air travel within Europe, then please quit and allow somebody more effective to do the job of Commission President. Under your new Mandate, you promised us a new and more competitive single market in Europe, yet you continue to ignore and avoid taking any action, when French Air Traffic Controllers close off our single market, with their recreational striking each Summer.

Please now act or quit. You have no excuse and no defence for your inaction on these repeated EU single market closures during French ATC strikes.

Yours sincerely,


Michael O'Leary
Group CEO

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Air Traffic Controllers' Strike In France Leads To Further Flight Cancellations

A strike by French air traffic controllers entered its second day on Friday and is causing further flight cancellations and delays. The aviation authority DGAC ordered cancellations of 40 percent of flights at the three most important Paris airports. The strike also affects other French airports.

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The civil aviation authority DGAC called on airlines to cancel 40 percent of flights at the three main Paris airports on Friday. According to the air traffic controllers, the reason for the strike is a lack of staff and outdated equipment. Up to half of the flights at other French airports, mainly in the south of the country, were also affected, according to the DGAC.

The lobby group Airlines for Europe (A4E) said that more than 1500 flights had been cancelled over the two days of strikes. This affects over 300,000 passengers. The strike is also responsible for almost 500,000 minutes of delays.

France's Transport Minister Philippe Tabarot described the strike as unacceptable. "The idea is to disrupt as many people as possible," he said in an interview with CNews.

Ryanair sharply criticized the strike and called for reforms of European air traffic control. More than 400 Ryanair flights and more than 70,000 passengers were affected, the airline announced. More than 350 of the cancelled flights are pure overflights that could be protected. The Irish low-cost carrier also demanded the resignation of Ursula von der Leyen, President of the EU Commission.

A4E demanded, among other things, a 21-day notice of strikes and the protection of overflights. "This strike is unacceptable," said A4E Managing Director Ourania Georgoutsakou. French air traffic control already delivers some of the worst delay rates in Europe.