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OPEN LETTER

FAILURE TO DELIVER ATC ON ETS REFORM

Dear Ursula,

I refer to the Draghi Report on European Competitiveness, published in Sept 2024, which has been sitting on your shelf gathering dust for almost 2 years now. Mario Draghi highlighted that Europe's "outdated, quasi-monopolistic state-owned ATC", costs the European economy €6 billion annually and generates 11.6m tonnes of excess CO2 emissions p.a.

Given your habit of making speeches about making Europe more competitive, we would have expected urgent action from you on ATC reform over these past 2 years. Airlines for Europe (A4E) have repeatedly called on you and your Commission to implement two simple ATC reforms as follows:

1. Mandate that Europe's ANSPs are fully staffed for the first wave of morning flights (with standby ATCOs in place) or face meaningful fines; and
2. Protect overflights during national ATC strikes.

Sadly, you have done nothing over the past 2 years on either of these simple reforms. You continue to wander around Europe making speeches about competitiveness while doing absolutely nothing to deliver it. I attach a summary of a recent French Senate report, which highlights that French ATC is "the worst in Europe" and has cost Europe's airlines "€800 million of excess costs and 6.6 million minutes of delays during 2025 alone." Why do you continue to stand idly by while this European incompetence and inefficiency continues?

If you were really serious about delivering Mario Draghi's roadmap on competitiveness, you would lead urgent reform of Europe's ATC services, and you would also deliver reform of Europe's harmful ETS tax system.

Under Europe's ETS, our citizens pay discriminatory environmental taxes, but only on intra-EU flights. Europe's penal ETS regime then exempts all flights arriving to, or departing from, the EU, particularly on long-haul flights (which account for over 53% of CO2 emissions). Once again, nothing has been done by you or your Commission to either reform or scrap this scandalous and discriminatory ETS regime in the interests of EU aviation competitiveness.

Isn't it time for you to stop making speeches and finally take real action to deliver your competitiveness agenda? Deliver the above simple reforms of Europe's failing ATC system and either abolish Europe's damaging ETS taxation regime or at least bring ETS rates into line with CORSIA rates, which is what non-EU airlines pay.

If you fail to act on Mario Draghi's competitiveness roadmap, then please resign and let somebody competent deliver the competitive future that Europe's airlines and our citizens so urgently need, and which you have clearly failed to deliver.

Yours sincerely,

Michael O'Leary
Group CEO

French ATC article

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News

FRENCH AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL, THE WORST IN EUROPE: 800 MILLION EUROS LOST AND 6.6 MILLION MINUTES LATE IN 2025, ACCORDING TO A SENATE REPORT

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3 comments



@Lille-Leequin

Unveiled on Wednesday in the Senate, a report presented by centrist senator **Vincent Capo-Canellas** makes a harsh assessment of the performance of **French air traffic control**, whose delays have cost airlines around **800 million euros** in 2025. The Special Rapporteur proposes a series of emergency measures to prevent France from becoming a real bottleneck in the European skies.

According to data compiled by the Senate's finance committee, the Directorate of Air Navigation Services (DSNA) is now the most delayed air navigation provider in Europe, with 6.6 million minutes of cumulative delay in 2025, an increase of 60% since 2019. These delays generated an estimated cost of €800 million for airlines and massive inconvenience for passengers, even as other European providers improved their performance over the same period.

Between 2015 and 2025, 33% of minutes of delay attributable to air traffic control in Europe originated in the DSNA, a proportion that rose to 36% in 2025. Eurocontrol's projections are particularly alarming: by 2030, if nothing changes, the average delay per flight could approach 4 minutes, with 1.3 billion euros in annual losses for airlines and flights structurally cancelled due to a lack of sufficient control capacity.

The structural causes of the underperformance

The report points out that the increase in traffic is not enough to explain France's underperformance, which is rather explained by shortcomings in forecasting and resource allocation. The DSNA is now content to take up Eurocontrol's global forecasts, which are considered too crude, while more detailed tools exist, such as the experiment conducted at the Centre en route de la navigation aérienne (CRNA) in Brest, which should be generalised.

A "demographic shock" is aggravating the situation, with 30% of air traffic controllers expected to retire between 2029 and 2035, in a context already marked by understaffing and tensions on territorial establishments (about 700 sites). In addition, work is considered more rigid than the European average and a significant technological debt, marked by bogged down modernization programs (including 4-Flight) and an increasingly obsolete and fragile technical architecture.

A confidence pact financed by fees

Vincent Capo-Canellas recalls that French air traffic control is an industrial and commercial activity financed by air navigation fees paid by airlines, as part of a multi-year European regulation. The dynamism of these fees is remarkable: their revenue increased by €303 million between 2024 and 2025, bringing the yield to €2.2 billion and allowing a faster-than-expected reduction in the debt of the Air Control and Operations Annex Budget (BACEA).

The rapporteur therefore considers it legitimate to allocate part of this surplus to the financing of a recruitment and productivity effort, in a "pact of confidence and responsibility" between the DSNA, the airlines and the State. This pact would be based on an increased performance commitment by the DSNA in exchange for additional resources, accompanied by increased transparency requirements on the effectiveness of the measures financed.

Accelerate and streamline the training of air traffic controllers

The first key recommendation is to significantly increase the recruitment of air traffic controllers from 2027, taking into account the capacities of the National School of Civil Aviation (ENAC) and using, if necessary, air traffic controllers trained in other European countries. The numerical objective is to recruit around 60 additional controllers per year for several years, an effort whose cost would be entirely financed by air navigation charges.

At the same time, the rapporteur points to a major handicap: the duration of training in France, which is around five years, compared with an average of three years in Europe, in particular because of the principle of "full rating" qualification, which requires systematic training in enroute, approach and turn checks. It proposes to study, within the framework of social dialogue, two levers to reduce this training time and bring it into line with European standards: postponing the obtaining of the engineering title to continuing education rather than initial training and gradually relaxing the principle of "full rating".

Increasing productivity through a more agile

organisation Despite some recent relaxations in terms of work organisation, the productivity of French air traffic controllers remains below the European average, with 0.81 average flights controlled per hour and per controller in 2024, compared to 0.98 on average in Europe. The report nevertheless notes that the cost of employment per hour of control remains lower in France (141 euros compared to 153 euros), which reinforces the legitimacy of a productivity effort rather than a simple budgetary adjustment.

The 2023-2027 social protocol has introduced flexibility measures (staggered increases, early departures, end of "clearances", etc.), but these remain costly – around €130 million per year, much more than the €100 million initially planned – and their effectiveness is not documented in a sufficiently precise manner. Vincent Capo-Carelles therefore asks the DSNA to carry out a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of each performance system, to mobilise as many as possible those that have demonstrated their interest and to relax the conditions of local implementation to better adapt resources to real air traffic.

Better allocation of control resources to traffic

To improve the match between control capacity and traffic demand, the report makes several operational recommendations. The DSNA is invited to produce its own traffic forecasts, which are more accurate than the Eurocontrol projections currently used, in order to anticipate the allocation of resources more effectively, in particular for the summer period.

In the context of social dialogue, it is recommended to relax the local conditions for the implementation of flexibility measures, to review duty tours each year according to a schedule and methods that incorporate summer traffic projections, and to optimise the management of "seconded controllers" assigned to administrative or training tasks. Finally, the rapporteur proposes to build a progressive roadmap to make the organisation of the work of French air traffic controllers more agile, in line with the practices observed by other European air navigation providers.

Reducing technological debt and securing systems

DSNA's technological debt has been identified as a key factor in underperformance, with modernisation programmes that have accumulated delays and additional costs, starting with the 4-Flight system, an emblem of modernisation, which is more than ten years behind schedule and has just experienced a new setback in Bordeaux and Brest. At the same time, the increasing obsolescence of many systems, including critical systems such as radiotelephone systems, weakens the technical architecture, multiplies failures and makes their management more complex.

The rapporteur calls on the DSNA to quickly adopt a real risk management plan based on an exhaustive mapping of obsolete infrastructure, the identification of potential risks and the associated management methods. It also recommends a multi-year programme to gradually but systematically reduce technical obsolescence, in order to restore the reliability of air traffic control systems and avoid new operational "crashes".

The report is available for download on [the Senate website](#).



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