



May 14, 2020

**Open letter to EC, EASA, Eurocontrol, CANSO and all European States and ANSPs.**

Dear **recipients**,

While the entire world is experiencing unprecedented difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is globally recognised that its impact on aviation and the related businesses and industries, is shocking. International organisations, governments and regulators must continue to take actions ensuring continuity of operations. In this respect it is very promising that the States and European institutions are working towards identifying ad-hoc financial means of support for ANSPs.

With this approach the above entities recognize that ANSPs are facing financial problems due to the reduction of traffic below the ANSP's sustainability income thresholds and we share the anguish on how the Air traffic operations will restart the soonest possible. On the other hand, the Covid-19 crisis has proved that the trend for 'market-based model' for ATM/ANS is not financially viable, as it can't afford nor does it ensure the economic resilience to address the difficulties induced by a crisis like the one we are currently experiencing.

**Therefore, with all due respect, the said model shouldn't be of a priority within the frame of SES 2+ updated package. The impact of the current crisis on the future business models must be considerably revisited. How the financial status of ANSPs will be influenced if COVID-19 comes back in this winter or most importantly in case of a potential 'next pandemic' appearance?**

Regardless of these bad scenarios, ATM/ANS staff continues to provide Air Navigation Services, ensuring permanent operation of aviation, offering also extremely important job at this particular period by serving mainly cargo and medical flight. In addition, the said employees continue to be seriously involved with projects including the forthcoming increase in automation and high-tech ATM/ANS technology and services implementation and deployment, coming from the SESAR pipeline.

This level of operation of aviation is foreseen to be seriously impacted if actions like reduction in the number of ATM/ANS staff or hasty **short-term economic measures** such as layoffs and even reduction of their salaries, as being envisaged to be taken by ANSPs, are realized. **This kind of actions** will create serious long-term problems while the foreseen benefits will be of limited and temporal importance.

ATM/ANS employees like ATCOs, ATSEP, AIM/AIS personnel and all other front-line actors, are all highly trained and competent. All that training and competency took several years and an immense cost to be build and accomplished and for this reason the said personnel is considered as the most valuable investment and asset of their organization.

More specifically the ATSEP personnel, are vital and honoring their jobs by being devoted to their mission, contributing through their everyday tasks 24/7 to the provision and safeguarding of **Availability, Accuracy and Integrity** of aeronautical data and maintaining the high availability figures of the ATM/ANS infrastructure, despite the difficulties introduced by this unprecedented crisis **keeping the skies open and safe.**

It is our strong believe that in order to maintain current operations safe and efficient, all ATM personnel must be kept ready, alert and involved, in a **hot standby state** so as to be able and competent to cope with the expected future demand. It will be catastrophic if we lose the Human capital and potential, what we have achieved all past years with respect to professionalism, specialization and consequently the safety and efficiency of operations by laying off ATM personnel or letting them go. It would take years to recover the lost ANSP Human capability.

We call upon the EC, EASA, EUROCONTROL, CANSO and all European States and ANSPs **to:**

1. **Recognize** that the provision of Air Navigation Services is indeed a critical infrastructure which plays a key role in the resolution of crisis situations.
2. **Ensure** that all qualified staff remains available and competent **during the** current COVID-19 crisis and beyond in order to manage commercial air traffic as soon as it returns to its levels.
3. **Refrain** from any action or measure, direct or indirect, against ATM/ANS personnel which will eventually jeopardize safety in Aviation in the long or short term and the quick recovery the operations soon.
4. **Consider**, implementing the means, through **Regulation**, to establish a mechanism for ANSPs to build economic resilience. ANSPs must be allowed to build economic strength and resilience for force majeure situations, since, having in mind the Chicago convention, where very clearly stated that the ANSPs “effectively are state critical infrastructure and are providing a state/public service”.

In this sense and considering the criticality of ATM/ANS, we wonder if the whole future ATM/ANS system planning approach (e.g. ATM MP) must be reconsidered and optimally rescheduled.

We all must be ready and fully prepared for the “**day after the crisis**” in order to smoothly recover and be able to take up ATM/ANS operations to normal figure of high demand again. The crisis will soon be over, but our planning should be focused on considering the above recommendations so as to be ready for the day after and for the next crisis.

Sincerely



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**IFATSEA Director Europe**