



Tweede Kamer

DER STATEN-GENERAAL

Information note and questionnaire Single European Sky

Introduction

With a view to the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union from January to June 2016, the standing committee on Infrastructure and the Environment of the Dutch House of Representatives appointed two parliamentary rapporteurs on the matter of the Single European Sky (SES) on 9 December 2015. In this way, the standing committee aims to strongly emphasise – following on from the example of the Dutch government – the importance that the House of Representatives attaches to this matter, for the Netherlands and Europe.

The House of Representatives is of the opinion that reducing detours of aircraft and reducing and preventing delays in Europe – the main objectives in creating the Single European Sky – will bring enormous benefits for European consumers, European airlines, and freight carriers, as well as in reducing CO2 emissions in Europe. At the same time, however, the House of Representatives notes that progress towards the creation of the Single European Sky is faltering significantly, and that the urgency to remove obstacles appears to be lacking in various member states, at which level many of the obstacles seem to manifest themselves.

First, the rapporteurs are requesting, through this position paper, that greater attention be paid to the subject of the Single European Sky in the interparliamentary circuit of national parliaments in the European Union, and in particular among the aviation spokesmen in the national parliaments. The rapporteurs first and foremost hope to convince their fellow parliamentarians of the great urgency that the Dutch House of Representatives feels with regard to this matter.

Second, the rapporteurs are appealing to the interparliamentary circuit to inform them of where exactly obstacles to the formation of the Single European Sky are located, and what the reason is for their being apparently insurmountable or, as the case may be, why they cannot be eliminated in the very short term. To that end, they would like to ask you a number of questions, in Section 2, with the request that the answers be provided no later than 1 June 2016. Your answers will be used in the preparations of the forthcoming high-level meeting of the SESAR (Single European Sky ATM Research¹) Joint Undertaking (hereinafter referred to as 'SJU'), which will be held in Amsterdam from 14 to 16 June 2016². This meeting, organised as part of the Dutch EU Presidency, is likely to have an interparliamentary dimension, with national parliamentarians being invited to take part in an in-depth dialogue on this subject, with the aim of raising the sense of urgency and, via interparliamentary discussions, to see where measures can be taken to remove obstacles. If it proves possible to organise this, you will receive more information in due course.

¹ <http://www.sesarju.eu/discover-sesar>

² <http://www.sesarju.eu/newsroom/events/sesar-showcase>



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1. The importance and the potential of creating the Single European Sky

The Single European Sky project is of great importance for every European member state. A Single European Sky will bring many benefits for European airlines, European consumers, freight carriers, and the environment in Europe. This means the Single European Sky is not only consistent with the aim of creating a competitive European aviation sector, but also with the aim of reducing fuel consumption and therefore the emissions of greenhouse gases. The purpose is to combat the fragmentation of European airspace (in other words, unnecessary detours) and to increase capacity (in other words, to reduce and prevent delays) by introducing additional rules regarding safety, airspace management, cost transparency, and interoperability. Progress is being made, but not quickly enough.

A large number of parties are involved with the creation of the Single European Sky because of the many aspects that the initiative entails. Examples that come to mind are the providers of aviation navigation services, system suppliers, airports, air traffic control organisations, the aircraft manufacturing industry, and airlines themselves. The Single European Sky initiative also involves objectives in relation to civil-military collaboration. The current situation is described concisely below; the three benefits that the creation of the Single European Sky would offer are dealt with in more detail.

1.1. *Current situation regarding legislation*

1.1.1. *European legislative procedure*

The initiative for a Single European Sky dates from the year 2000. Two legislative packages have been agreed. The legislation set down by the Council and the European Parliament in 2009 (SES II)³ for creating a common air space more quickly from 2012 is currently being implemented. In other words, member states are already committed to performance targets through existing Single European Sky legislation. These are laid down in the performance regulations for the Single European Sky⁴.

Unfortunately, current legislation is not being fully implemented, and targets are not being reached. European airspace remains fragmented and its services are relatively costly. In the recent aviation strategy for Europe, presented by the European Commission, the costs of the fragmentation of the EU airspace are estimated to be at least five billion a year.⁵ In particular, the unit costs of aviation navigation services are high: according to the European Commission, the costs of user charges, delays, and flight inefficiencies to the airlines still amount to 10.5 billion euros a year. The high costs are the result of, among other things,

³ Regulation (EC) no. 1070/2009 of 21 October 2009.

⁴ Regulation (EU) no. 691/2010 of 29 July 2010.

⁵ European Commission document, 'An Aviation Strategy for Europe' COM (2015) 598, dated 7 December 2015.



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fragmented services and infrastructure and outdated technology.⁶ The importance of making a substantial contribution to reducing CO2 emissions has greatly increased following the Paris agreement, but the sector itself does not form any part of the agreement. It has been agreed that the sector itself will take steps to actively tackle this aspect. It is precisely the aviation sector that can benefit greatly as a result of the implementation of SES.

1.1.2. Functional aviation blocks

Each member state is also working jointly with other member states on the performance targets, within so-called functional aviation blocks (FABs). For example, the Netherlands is working in the FABEC block together with Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. Great Britain is also an important partner here.

However, too little progress is being made in the functional aviation blocks as well. Although all the FABs are now in place, and member states have either introduced appropriate measures or drawn up implementation plans, no definitive solution to all the problems is yet in sight, according to the European Commission.⁷ There are still underlying problems, and many FABs have no optimised aviation services and are not based solely on operational requirements regardless of national boundaries, as a result of which airspace is still not being used as efficiently or effectively as possible.

1.1.3. Technological development

Finally there is the important question of the technological modernisation of the Single European Sky. Technological developments play a major part in the implementation of current legislation, and this is where the greatest development opportunities lie in the next twenty years, according to the European Commission⁸. The technological aspects are brought together in the SESAR. The greatest challenge at present is the simultaneous roll-out of SESAR solutions. The forthcoming high-level meeting of the SESAR (Single European Sky ATM Research⁹) Joint Undertaking (hereinafter referred to as 'SJU'), which will be held in Amsterdam from 14 to 16 June 2016, will be concerned chiefly with what has so far been achieved; it will also focus on the challenges in the short and medium term.¹⁰

It can be concluded that the roll-out of the current legislation is taking longer than is desirable. The progress depends on the aviation services being organised more efficiently on the basis of sectoral partnerships, including agreements between member states, and the introduction of various measures designed to reduce the fragmentation of the airspace.

⁶ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council concerning the implementation and progress of the Single European Sky between 2012 and 2014, COM(2015) 663 final, interinstitutional dossier 2013/0186 (COD), dated 17 December 2015.

⁷ Ditto.

⁸ Ditto.

⁹ <http://www.sesarju.eu/discover-sesar>

¹⁰ For more information, go to: <http://www.sesarju.eu/newsroom/events/sesar-showcase>



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1.1.4. SESII+

In addition to current legislation, a proposal has been in place since 2013 for reviewing existing regulations. To that end, the European Commission published a legislation package on 11 June 2013 for the implementation of the Single European Sky (SESII+¹¹). However, the progress of this legislation package has come to a standstill because of a discussion concerning Gibraltar. No decisions regarding the legislative package are expected until this issue has been resolved. The House of Representatives very much regrets this. This is why the rapporteurs are concentrating on the implementation of the existing regulations concerning the Single European Sky.

1.2. *Advantages of a Single European Sky*

1.2.1. *Strengthening the competitive position of the European aviation sector*

The European aviation sector is facing increasingly strong competition from companies from other parts of the world, such as the Middle East. Given that European airlines use European airspace to a much greater degree, its own aviation sector is more affected in relative terms by the disadvantages encountered by the airlines resulting from aircraft detours. After all, the entire air traffic control system is funded by the airlines.

The less than fully optimal functioning of air traffic management organisations is directly reflected in the higher charges that airlines pay for air traffic control. The European Commission has calculated that between 2012 and 2014, airlines paid around 19 billion euros in aviation navigation charges.¹² Depending on the type of airline, these costs represent six to ten percent of their operating costs. These costs are ultimately passed on to passengers. Ticket prices are still the main criterion that passengers look at when booking a flight. A rapid and far-reaching optimisation of air traffic control in European airspace will immediately result in fewer costs for European airlines. It can be expected that this will lead to lower ticket prices for consumers. That is why airlines are continually asking their governments to raise levels of efficiency. This will help further improve their competitive position.

1.2.2. *Benefits for European consumers and European freight carriers*

The inability of air traffic organisations to function optimally has a direct effect on the quality of the services that are provided to passengers and freight carriers. The European Commission calculates that 40% of all delays are primarily or secondarily attributable to sub-

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/single_european_sky/ses_2_en.htm

¹² Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council concerning the implementation and progress of the Single European Sky between 2012 and 2014, COM(2015) 663 final, interinstitutional dossier 2013/0186 (COD), dated 17 December 2015.



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optimal air traffic control or the weather.¹³ If airlines are forced to fly longer routes than necessary, this will increase their fuel costs which – logically – will be reflected in higher ticket prices.

As previously stated, the European Commission calculates that between 2012 and 2014, airlines paid around 19 billion euros in aviation navigation charges. Depending on the type of airline, these costs represent six to ten percent of their operating costs. These are ultimately borne by passengers, and the users of airspace are understandably continually asking for greater efficiency. Logically, this situation also applies to freight carriers. Much freight is currently transported in the cargo sections of passenger aircraft, as a result of which the distinction between freight and passenger aircraft is less clear-cut than was the case in the past.

1.2.3. Contribution to fighting climate change

Sub-optimal air traffic control also affects the environment in Europe. After all, longer air routes lead to greater emissions. The European Commission calculates that sub-optimal air traffic control accounts for six percent of aviation-related CO₂ emissions.¹⁴ In the light of the recent climate agreements that were concluded in Paris, it is very important that CO₂ emissions in Europe are reduced. Greater unification of European airspace can help this process.

The European Commission has also calculated that the horizontal 'en route' flight efficiency (shorter routes) improved somewhat in 2013 (5.11%), but the objective (4.92%) was not reached. The flight efficiency in 2014 was 4.9%. This fell short of the target figure for that year (4.67%). In some cases, airlines elected to take the least expensive, as opposed to the shortest, routes (in terms of charging zones).¹⁵

2. Questions on obstacles to further implementation

The rapporteurs are aiming to identify, at interparliamentary level, where exactly obstacles to the formation of the Single European Sky are located, and what the reason is for their being apparently insurmountable or, as the case may be, why they cannot be eliminated in the very short term. They are therefore calling upon their fellow parliamentarians, and in particular spokesmen for the aviation industry, to respond to the following questions and statements.

1.

¹³ Ditto.

¹⁴ Ditto.

¹⁵ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council concerning the implementation and progress of the Single European Sky between 2012 and 2014, COM(2015) 663 final, interinstitutional dossier 2013/0186 (COD), dated 17 December 2015.



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Aviation has traditionally been a challenging sector in terms of regulation and bilateral/multilateral agreements, given that they relate to the sovereign airspace of a state. It is logical that this aspect plays a role in the process of further unifying European airspace. The most telling example of this is the stalemate that has arisen with regard to the SES II+ regulation.

Can you state the extent to which issues of sovereignty in your member state, of whatever kind, are hindering further integration of European airspace, and in particular in the FAB in which your member state is active? Can you say where exactly the areas of sensitivity lie, and what could or should be done in order to eliminate such areas?

2.

The European Commission has identified continuing monopolies among air traffic control organisations, which prevent any form of healthy market competition, as one of the risks threatening the rapid and efficient progress of the Single European Sky project.¹⁶

Can you describe the role of the air traffic control organisation(s) in your member state, and their willingness to quickly reach agreements concerning the consistent and prompt implementation of existing EU regulations and to take other steps that will bring unification of the European airspace closer? Can you state which factors affect the degree of such willingness, including with regard to the FABs in which every member state is working with its neighbouring member states on achieving the current Single European Sky performance targets?

In this context, can you describe any social aspects in your member state that constitute an obstruction to further development of the Single European Sky? Possible examples here include the risk of job losses as a result of changes to the structure of air traffic control organisations.

3.

Military-civil collaboration forms an important part of creating a Single European Sky. Although the initiatives are aimed at civil aviation, military organisations are closely involved, as is also the case with the implementation of SESAR.

Can you describe the status of military-civil collaboration in your member state, with regard to the Single European Sky? In doing so, can you say whether there are any obstacles to further military-civil collaboration, and if so what they are, including in the FAB in which your member state is active?

4.

The European Commission published a legislation package for a review of existing regulations for the implementation of the Single European Sky on 11 June 2013: Single

¹⁶ Ditto.



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European Sky, SESII+¹⁷. Very little progress has been made since that time, and the negotiation process has come to a complete standstill.

Can you give your views on the current lack of progress with regard to the SESII+ package? In doing so, can you state whether you also believe it important that progress should be made with regard to the package?

5.

The Dutch House of Representatives is aware that the aforementioned questions and statements are not necessarily exhaustive for the purpose of identifying the obstacles to the creation of the Single European Sky. It may be that there are other obstacles that have not been included in the questions and statements.

Can you state whether there are any other obstacles to the creation of a Single European Sky? If so, can you say where exactly these obstacles are located, and what the reason is for their being apparently insurmountable or, as the case may be, why they cannot be eliminated in the very short term?

Finally, the rapporteurs would like to appeal to you to raise the subject of the Single European Sky in your parliament, and if possible, to encourage your government to commit itself to help progress in this area at European level – for the sake of European consumers, European airlines and freight carriers, and for reducing CO2 emissions in Europe.

¹⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/single_european_sky/ses_2_en.htm