

Single European Sky: Council agrees its position

The Council reached a general approach on two proposals to **make the European air transport system more efficient** and to update the Single European Sky (SES) initiative. Both draft regulations are part of the **SES2+** package.

Single European Sky - a reform of Europe's airspace

Launched in 2004, the Single European Sky initiative aims to reform the organisation and management of European airspace. Its goal is to overcome the current fragmentation of the airspace, to make air traffic services more efficient and to optimise the use of air traffic management capacity. Straighter flight paths and greater cooperation should make flying even safer, cut costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. All this should also make the European air transport sector more competitive in relation to other regions of the world.

Implementation of the Single European Sky

The draft regulation on the implementation of the Single European Sky is intended to speed up the modernisation of EU air traffic management and air navigation services. As a "recast" proposal it brings the four existing SES regulations together under one legislative act and revises them.

Under the text agreed by ministers, the Single European Sky will comprise a coherent pan-European network of routes. European airspace, network management and air traffic management systems will become **progressively more integrated**.

One of the objectives of the SES is to make national air traffic organisations work together in regional airspace blocks called "**functional airspace blocks**" or FABs. This should help increase the capacity of air traffic management (ATM) and make it more efficient. Under the general approach, the FABs will be set up on the basis of agreements between member states. Wherever beneficial, they will be supported by industrial partnerships. The flexibility created by industrial partnerships is intended to maximise the performance of FABs and even to improve that of the European air traffic management network as a whole.

Member states may choose to set up an operational plan describing the actions to be taken to implement the FABs. This replaces the provision on Commission implementing acts contained in the Commission proposal.

The SES includes **performance targets** related to safety, the environment, capacity and cost-efficiency. The text agreed by ministers introduces more dynamism and flexibility in the process of setting EU-wide and local performance plans and putting them into practice. It sets up a dialogue between the stakeholders and provides for a revision of the performance plan or the local targets where required.

National supervisory authorities will have to be independent of any air navigation service providers. This is to further improve safety and oversight and to prevent any conflicts of interest. Where not legally distinct, national supervisory authorities will have to be functionally separate from the air navigation service providers. The separation concerns in particular their organisation, hierarchy and decision-making. This should guarantee the required independence in terms of finances, management and staffing. At the same time, it does not require costly changes to member states' existing administrative systems and ownership structures.

Opening **support services** to competition will remain voluntary. Such services include for instance communication, navigation and meteorological services. In addition, air navigation service providers may continue to bundle support services with core air navigation services. This reflects the consideration that unbundling services and subjecting them to market conditions, as suggested by the original proposal, would not be the best way to achieve the goal of safe, cost-efficient, high-quality, socially acceptable and internationally compliant air navigation services.

The Commission is to carry out an independent study on whether any support services related to the European air traffic management network (EATMN) could be provided centrally by Eurocontrol or by a group of air navigation service providers.

The Italian presidency decided to adopt a general approach with paragraph 5 of Article 1 in square brackets. This means that the Council has not taken any position on the application of this proposal to Gibraltar airport. The question on how this issue can be reflected in the text will be decided at a later stage, in the light of the outcome of discussions between Spain and UK.

Amended European Aviation Safety Agency rules

The proposed EASA amendments are intended to bring the current scope of the EASA regulation into line with the SES legislation and to include the SES interoperability concepts. The update also takes into account recent developments in the SESAR research programme. Lastly, it aims to align the current regulation with the principles contained in the common approach on decentralised agencies agreed between the European Parliament, Council and Commission in June 2012.

In order to make swift progress on the SES 2+ package as a whole, the agreed compromise contains only those articles which are directly linked to the Single European Sky recast proposal. This solution was chosen bearing in mind that the Commission is expected to submit a separate proposal on the overall revision of the EASA regulation in 2015. Some core issues related to the agency's status and role, such as its name or financing structure, are left to be examined in that context.

The adoption of the two regulations requires the approval of both the Council and the European Parliament.

- [Single European Sky](#)
- [European Aviation Safety Agency \(EASA\)](#)
- [SESAR joint undertaking](#)
- [SKYbrary](#)