



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS' ASSOCIATIONS

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PRESS RELEASE

The Air Traffic Situation in Belgium

The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations, IFATCA, is deeply concerned about the developments within Belgocontrol, the Belgian air traffic services provider, and the problems these have caused for the safe and efficient flow of air traffic in the region.

This conflict again highlights the shortcomings within the Belgian air traffic control system. In a letter to the Belgian government in 2009, IFATCA highlighted the unacceptable and potentially unsafe working conditions and lacking involvement of staff representatives. Despite continued promises made by management, no measurable improvements can be seen - on the contrary.

Air traffic controllers are faced with unworkable rosters to account for the long lasting lack of recruitment and training of personnel. In all likelihood, these practises violate European rules on air traffic controller working conditions and fatigue management. Controllers have to cope with incessant, politically-driven procedure changes and are frequently confronted with technical outages. Their pension age is now set to well exceed the accepted norm for controllers working high-density airspace. On top of this already almost unbearable pressure, a slanderous campaign was launched against highly skilled professionals without any respect or consideration for their continued commitment that has helped the Belgian aviation system survive crisis upon crisis.

Besides the local problems, there is also a European dimension to the conflict. Both in Belgium as elsewhere in Europe, air traffic control increasingly has to rely on the willingness of individuals to make the system work. If controllers, responsibly and in accordance with EU regulation, declare a 'provisional inability' to safely perform their duty, the system collapses, resulting in huge delays and painful situations for all involved stakeholders.

Similar situations have been experienced in Spain, Poland, France and other European countries. Under pressure from the European Commission to minimize costs, service providers have significantly reduced or stopped investing in their staff and in modernization of technical

- 50 Years of Professional Involvement -
IFATCA has been representing air traffic controllers
since 1961, with more than 50.000 members in over
125 countries worldwide.

equipment. While this may save money in the short term, this shortsightedness will in the long run create major problems to maintain a safe and efficient Air Traffic Management system.

IFATCA calls upon all European governments and the Commission to finally understand that the current approach of the Single European Sky undertaking puts the entire system at risk. To consider only cost saving without regard to safety and human factors is having dramatic and possibly irreversible effects throughout our industry.

The modernization process of the Air Traffic Management system in Europe can only be achieved if the affected service providers and staff, in particular the air traffic controllers, are involved to find safe and sustainable solutions. Controllers are not part of the problem: they are an absolutely essential part of the solution!

The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers (IFATCA) represents more than 50.000 Air Traffic Controllers in 128 countries. We enjoy a worldwide reputation amongst all partners in Air Traffic Management with representation in many areas including ICAO and Eurocontrol. Promoting safety, efficiency and cooperation in international air navigation is of paramount importance to us.