



ADINA VĂLEAN
MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Rue de la Loi, 200
B-1049 Brussels
adina.valean@ec.europa.eu

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Dear Minister,

This summer is expected to be one of the busiest so far in terms of air travel. The latest forecasts from Eurocontrol show strong demand by European and overseas travellers alike. Air traffic levels are expected to be up to 15% higher than summer 2022 in many parts of Europe. Therefore, I want to take this opportunity to highlight the issues passengers will face and underline the importance of taking action now, to avoid the chaos we witnessed last summer. The situation is also further exacerbated by Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, which has led to a major reduction in the airspace available to civilian aviation in Europe.

In short, we will be dealing with substantially higher traffic volumes with a significantly reduced airspace.

In certain EU airports, the situation looks better than last year but staff shortages may still occur, including in air traffic management and ground handling companies. Airports, air navigation services providers and ground handlers are taking measures to address staff shortages, and in support of these efforts, it is essential, for instance, to help prioritise and reduce the waiting time for background checks for critical airport staff, ensure that contingency plans are in place, facilitate training and cross-border mobility of personnel, and promote dialogue between all stakeholders to address disputes before they escalate. Ensuring sufficient border control capacity is equally critical.

In addition, possible industrial action by aviation sector workers can cause further disruption and inconvenience for passengers. This spring we saw industrial action in several Member States causing considerable disturbance to the European air traffic management network. While the right to strike is a fundamental right, it is important that measures are taken to mitigate the impact of strikes on the overall network. In 2017, the Commission encouraged Member States to take measures to preserve overflights, and notably to ensure 100% continuity of service for flights crossing the airspace of strike-affected Member States, having no part in the strikes, as already done by some Member States.¹ I strongly urge you to consider implementing these recommendations, especially regarding the protection of overflights, to help improve service continuity in air traffic

¹ Communication - Aviation: Open and Connected Europe, COM(2017) 286 final, s. 3.2.

management. This would help to reduce flight cancellations and delays for European travellers but also emissions due to extra mileage.

In order to prepare for this summer's travel season, predictability and cooperation among stakeholders is critical. This means sharing information and best practices, as well as working together to identify potential risks and taking measures to mitigate them. I invite you to work closely with airlines, airports, air navigation service providers and Eurocontrol's Network Manager to anticipate potential issues and respond quickly and effectively to any disruptions. I must underline the vital role of the Network Manager in ensuring the smooth operation of air traffic flows in Europe through its Network Operations Plan.

We are following this matter closely and are working with all relevant stakeholders to raise awareness and to exchange best practices to maximise air transport capacity. But we rely very much on the efforts of Member States in making this collective effort a success.

The EU has vibrant air transport market, offering unparalleled connectivity and affordability of travel to our citizens. We are taking decisive measures to decarbonise aviation and in doing so, securing its long-term future in our society. Now we must also provide leadership and support to our aviation stakeholders to ensure a safe and efficient air travel experience this summer.

Only together can we bring about the improvements the systems desperately needs. I have therefore asked the Swedish Presidency to have an exchange on this topic at the upcoming Transport Council in June.

Yours faithfully,


Adina VĂLEAN