

cepStudy

Single European Sky

Status and Prospects

May 2011

Key Points

- ▶ The major part of EU air traffic takes place across borders. Even 60 years after the start of the EU, air traffic control is still carried out along national borders. This fragmentation costs more than 3 billion Euros per year.
- ▶ Though the European institutions have paved the way for a Single European Sky with two packages of measures in 2004 and 2009, Europe is not even close to reaching that goal.
- ▶ The objectives of the Single European Sky are to
 - organise and control the European airspace more according to actual traffic flows than to national borders;
 - increase its capacity and
 - establish an internal market for air navigation services.
- ▶ The first attempt to establish a uniform European airspace – which was made in 1961 along with the establishment of Eurocontrol – failed, as the participating six Member States were not willing to assign national sovereignty powers.
- ▶ The latest renewed attempt to create a uniform European airspace, namely the Single European Sky, could be successful for the following reasons:
 - With the end of the Cold War, airspace no longer needs to be used primarily for military aviation, so Member States can assign national sovereignty powers more easily.
 - Steadily growing air traffic makes it essential to use airspace capacities more efficiently and to create new ones.
 - As of 2012, the EU will integrate air traffic into the EU CO₂ Emission Trading System (EU ETS) and thus will make it more expensive. Consequently, there is growing pressure on politics to compensate as far as possible for this rise in costs through efficient airspace management.
 - European airlines and large airports are exposed to strong competition from the Middle East. Therefore, any unnecessary increase in the costs of European air traffic threatens jobs.
 - The EU has assigned more powers to the European Commission – with the two Single European Sky packages of measures – than to Eurocontrol, which is an interstate body. Hence, the Commission can put pressure on Member States to set legally binding targets for increased capacities and efficient air routes.

- ▶ The completion of the Single European Sky does not necessarily guarantee success: the applicable committee procedure limits the Commission's scope of action. Moreover, the Commission depends on the cooperation with national supervisory authorities and air navigation service providers.
- ▶ The Commission must find the right balance between local conditions on the one hand, and European interests and fast decision-making processes on the other hand – i.e. the right combination of “bottom-up” and “top-down” elements:
- ▶ Experiences with the implementation of both packages of measures have shown that “top-down” elements are decisive in creating a Single European Sky. The Commission should therefore take all efforts to tackle occurring delays. In particular, the Commission should open infringement proceedings against those Member States who fail to comply with their obligation to establish Functional Airspace Blocks (FABs) by 4 December 2012.
- ▶ First of all, FABs are to achieve in the respective Member States the objectives to which the EU aspires for the whole of Europe through the Single European Sky. Hence, the establishment of FABs is crucial for the success of the entire Single European Sky project: if they fail, the Single European Sky will fail too.
- ▶ It remains to be seen whether or not the most important FAB in the EU, the FABEC above central Europe, can fulfil its expectations. For the FABEC agreement signed in December 2010 contains declarations of intent only.
- ▶ The first great challenge will be June 2011, when the Member States participating in FABEC intend to agree on legally binding performance targets – e.g. cheaper air navigation services – to be implemented by air navigation service providers between 2012 and 2014 (so-called FABEC Performance Plan).