

## **FABEC traffic growth was slow and volatile in 2021**

23 February 2022 – Functional Airspace Block Europe Central (FABEC) traffic began its recovery in 2021 following COVID, reaching 3.2 million flights compared with 2.7 million in 2020 – the lowest level for 25 years. However rising demand was slow and accompanied by extreme volatility, bringing new challenges for air navigation service providers (ANSPs) working towards Europe’s green agenda.

Unexpected hikes in demand saw traffic rise 30.3% in French airspace while at the same time increasing only 12.4% in the adjacent Maastricht Upper Area Control (MUAC) airspace in 2021. Unplanned flights place pressure on airspace capacity and staff resources and the rules governing the trade-off between traffic volume, capacity and environmental impact offer no clear guidance on balancing priorities which have remained unchanged since the start of the performance scheme.

FABEC Champion Performance and Finance and DFS CEO Arndt Schoenemann said: “FABEC ANSPs are happy that traffic is coming back step by step. However, we recognize a much higher volatility of traffic volumes. Strong traffic peaks during this recovery period are particularly challenging for all air navigation service providers. We assume that we have to consider such peaking also in the months to come.”

On-time performance remained extremely high in 2021, with 97% of departures departing without delays attributed to air traffic flow management (AFTM) measures corresponding to aspects like insufficient capacity or bad weather conditions during the enroute phase of the flight. Close to destination tower and approach controllers handled the traffic with almost no restrictions at all. 99.2% of flights arrived at the landing phase without delay or restrictions caused by icing on the runway, thunderstorms or strong winds close to the airports. The overall punctuality from a passenger point of view was also very good. Based on data submitted by airline pilots to the EUROCONTROL CODA interactive dashboard, 29.5% of flights arrived with 5 minutes or more delay compared to their scheduled arrival time compared to 31.1% for the European network, taking into account contributions from airspace users, airports and air navigation service providers.

*The airspace of the six FABEC States of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland is one of the busiest and most complex in the world. The majority of the major European airports, major civil airways and military training areas are located in this area. FABEC airspace covers 1.7 million km<sup>2</sup> and handles the majority of European air traffic. Winner of the ATM 2020 Research, Innovation and Environment Award.*

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