Frank Brenner has worked in Air Traffic Management for his entire career. He has been Director General of EUROCONTROL since 1 January 2013.

Since taking up his functions at EUROCONTROL, he has initiated the development of a Vision and Strategy, including the development of Centralised Services as part of the SESAR deployment concentrating on how to support controllers with new technology which increases safety.

Before joining EUROCONTROL, Frank Brenner was General Manager Operations for FABEC, Vice Chairman of EUROCONTROL's Performance Review Commission and a member of the Performance Review Body. Trained as an air traffic controller, he has held a number of posts at DFS including Head of ATM Operations, Director of Operations at the Business Unit for Aeronautical Data Management and Director of DFS's Control Centre Business Unit.

Dear Reader,

Workload affects us all and, as this edition highlights, many factors affect the workload of controllers and could potentially have an impact upon performance – most importantly, upon safety. So it is useful to step back a little, to see how European ATM is changing and to consider what impact this might have for controllers.

Some of the changes are very clear. For example, traffic is starting to grow again and this growth is expected to continue, with our latest medium term forecast predicting an average annual growth rate of 2.1% over the next seven years; this means that by 2021 we will see an extra 2.5 million flights a year, with particularly rapid growth in south east Europe.

We are also seeing more aircraft flying at higher flight levels, even for short/medium haul flights. This will change the distribution of aircraft in Europe's airspace and will also mean more climbing and descending. Another big change is the adoption of Free Routes Airspace (FRA), which is being progressively introduced, both geographically and also time-wise, with FRA being made available not just at night and/or at weekends but more generally throughout the week.

The tools available to controllers are changing. For example, although datalink has had a slow start, we can expect to see it being used much more widely as we overcome some of the problems initially encountered. We will need it in order to cope with higher traffic levels and also in order to achieve some of the performance enhancements envisaged. The SESAR operational concept is very clearly one which is based on the extensive sharing of real time data and datalink is a significant first step.

This concept will also bring much greater predictability. We are already seeing much better information from airports on exactly when aircraft will depart, both as part of the Airport Collaborative Decision Making programme and also as a result of the rollout of the Advanced Tower concept for other airports. This will be very important to our efforts to enhance the capacity and efficiency of the network as a whole.

The structure of ATM is also changing, with a greater realisation that the traditional model of each individual ANSP doing everything itself is outdated and is not the most efficient or cost-effective approach. So we will see more services being performed centrally, being jointly operated or being jointly procured. Not everything needs to be housed in the same building and we are even seeing the concepts of remote towers or virtual centres being explored.

All this change means that it is particularly important to review constantly the human part of ATM and, in particular, the role of the controllers, who are at the heart of ensuring safety in Europe's skies. How will the way they work be affected? Will the resulting workload be sustainable and safe? What can be done to help? I am sure that this edition of Hindsight will be valuable to all of us faced with these questions.

Frank Brenner