

Taking airports and aviation away from people: the despicable example of Berlin

Open Letter to:

David Sassoli: President, European Parliament

Elisa Ferreira: European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms

Janez Lenarcic: European Commissioner for Crisis Management

Adina Valean: European Commissioner for Transport

Dear President and Commissioners,

As a frequent user and actor of the European air transportation system, and member of several general aviation (GA) associations, I struggle now as I see Berlin, one of the iconic capitals of Europe, setting the totally wrong example.

BER is at last close to opening, but TXL is in the process of total shutdown over the coming days. This irreversible action would leave Berlin as the main capital in Europe with a single accessible airport.

This has two main impacts: it makes Berlin inaccessible to GA in practical terms, taking aviation even further away from the people, but, worse still, it leaves the city without any practical space on which to base any relevant airborne emergency services or disaster-relief.

While proximity is not such a critical aspect for commercial aviation traffic, it is critical from the above points of view.

Of the three Berlin Airports: THF, TXL, SXF/BER, the former two are effectively closed or closing, leaving only the latter, 30 km away from the city as the only airport serving it. This renders it inadequate both for GA and emergency services. The next closest airfield is QXH 55km away.

TXL should remain open for general aviation and emergency services, not major commercial traffic, thereby serving to maintain it open as a location close to the city on which to base any future environmentally friendly transportation means as well as making it available for emergency services and disaster relief, while eliminating 99% of its environmental impact.

The institutions that you represent surely are fostering and implementing policies with a goal to make transport infrastructure useful as a cohesion and service tool and proximate to persons. The EC has brought welcome, if late, policies towards GA with the aim of reversing the negative trend, and the EU parliament already published its recommendations for a sustainable future of GA, in line with our request.

Sadly TXL is not alone in the EU, heralding an increasing trend of making airports and major cities less and less accessible to GA, not only due to existing commercial traffic, which is a mostly unavoidable situation, but also due to unwarranted and disproportionate measures like prior-permission-required, slot restrictions, mandatory handling, outrageous fees and crazily restricted opening times.

Beyond the damage to the EU concept of territorial cohesion afforded by the effective inaccessibility of Berlin to GA, of all cities in the world, Berlin should know, from experience of 72 years ago, how important it can be to have adequate flexible transportation resources close to the people in need in times of disaster.

The matter is grave enough not to be left to local decision-makers alone.

We therefore ask you to remind and urge the European governments, and, in particular, that of the Federal Republic of Germany, to implement urgent measures with the goal of avoiding the irreversible loss of valuable transport infrastructure with the closure of airports in close proximity of cities. This is particularly urgent and trend-setting in the case of TXL: by maintaining a minimum activity with GA and emergency services, the city would have time to design and implement a proper, long-term readaptation of the facilities to the new situation: it is essential that some flying activity is continuing to be allowed at TXL.

We are available to contribute our expertise [and that of the organizations we represent] to aid in achieving the above objectives in the most useful and friendly way.

Kind regards,