In a statement from EUROCONTROL in mid-January Joe Sultana, Director Network Manager, said he often observes: ‘The focus of our work is the sound performance of the European network, delivered in a cost-effective manner. Every day we look at our outputs and assess whether we have contributed sufficiently to this goal.’

He added: ‘At the end of 2015, the ATFM delay target of 0.5 minutes per flight across Europe was not met. The bottlenecks were known and much was initiated and achieved. Let us have a first overview of what was once again a challenging year.’

This overview of 2015 indicated:

External factors such as airspace restrictions, the volatility of geo-political situations and severe weather had an impact on NM’s performance targets.

The unstable political situation within and at the borders of the NM area and, in particular, events in southeast Turkey in July/August, as well as in Iran, Iraq and Syria in October, coupled with the issue over the Sinai peninsula, all had a significant impact on flight efficiency and the general environment – longer routes had to be flown to avoid dangerous zones. Even under those circumstances the actual trajectory targets have been met showing that the European airspace structure offers appropriate capabilities.

It was a busy 2015, with European aviation traffic just missing the all-time high recorded in 2008. There were capacity shortfalls mainly in Cyprus and France, which made it difficult to achieve network delay targets. Industrial action added to the complexity.

A limited number of air traffic control centres (ACCs) generated delays in a busy summer, largely due to insufficient flexibility in sector availability. Other ACCs struggled to cope with traffic increases in those sectors affected by the shift in flows resulting from geo-political events – and higher route charges. In the autumn, the weather was the main disruptive element, causing higher than average delay.

On a positive note, performance has significantly improved in Spain and Poland as the Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) have worked closely with the Network Manager and have implemented the measures commonly agreed, thus meeting their performance targets and making a big difference for those airspace users flying in Spanish and Polish airspace.
The good news is that the traffic is growing again: there was an increase of 1.4% between January and October. When focusing on summer traffic figures, the value reaches an increase of 1.6%, compared with the same period in 2014. Friday 28 August was the busiest day in 2015, with 33,547 flights recorded in the European network.

A flavour of 2016
Early in December 2015, the European Commission adopted its new Aviation Strategy, which will enable European aviation to maintain its leadership worldwide and to grow in an increasingly competitive global environment.

In its role as Network Manager, EUROCONTROL is ready, it is understood, to help meet the priorities defined in the Strategy.

NM will be working on:

- reducing the limits to growth in the air and on the ground;
- maintaining high EU-wide standards in the areas of safety, security, environmental protection, social dialogue;
- advancing innovation and technology;
- improving the efficiency and flexibility of the system;
- optimising the use of available resources