

Ryanair hands 1.1m passenger air-traffic control strike petition to European Commission

Airline wants commission to protect flights passing through French air space during stoppages

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Michael O'Leary, chief executive of Ryanair, wants the European Commission to counter the impact of French air traffic control strikes. Photograph: Victor J Blue/Bloomberg

Barry O'Halloran
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More than one million people have signed a Ryanair petition demanding that the European Commission protect holidaymakers’ flights during French air traffic control strikes.

Ryanair wants the commission to protect flights that are passing through the country’s air space but which do not land there, as these are worst hit during French air traffic control strikes that have already disrupted millions of travellers so far this year.

The airline delivered a petition, Protect Overflights: Keep EU Skies Open, on Wednesday to commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, containing 1.1 million signatures from “fed-up passengers” who want overflights protected.

Michael O’Leary, Ryanair Holdings plc chief executive, pointed out that French minimum service laws protect domestic and short-haul flights during strikes, disproportionately hitting services passing through its air space between other European countries.



“People stuck in Ireland cannot get to Italy, people in Germany cannot get to Spain, people in Poland cannot get to Portugal and so on,” said Mr O’Leary.

He added that if France “wants to cancel flights” it could axe domestic services or short-haul services taking off from there, as travellers have other options including driving or public transport.



He pointed out that Italian, Greek and Spanish minimum service rules protect overflights when their air traffic controllers down tools, so there is already a precedent for Ryanair’s proposal.

“All we are asking is that the commission take this simple action,” he said.

Ryanair fears that the next round of strikes on June 6th will hit holidaymakers who have booked out the airline’s flights that weekend, the first of the school holidays in many European countries.

So far this year French air traffic controllers have staged 57 days of strikes, 10 times more than in 2022.

The workers have joined others in the country in protesting at President Emmanuel Macron’s plans to increase the retirement age to 64 from 62.

Ryanair was forced to cancel 300 overflights in one day as a consequence of one stoppage, according to Mr O’Leary.



He maintained that the company’s proposal would not affect air traffic control workers’ right to strike.

However, the airline’s petition calls for 21 days’ notice of such stoppages and binding arbitration for air traffic control disputes.

“It is unacceptable that air traffic control strikes can result in the cancellation of thousands of EU passengers’ flights, while France and other EU member states use minimum service laws to protect domestic flights,” Mr O’Leary said in a statement.

Meanwhile, he said he did not believe that any airline would restart Cork-Dublin flights. Kenny Jacobs, chief executive of DAA, the State company that operates both airports, said this week that he would be “amazed” if this did not happen.

However, the Ryanair boss said that his company was the last to operate this service and pointed out that the number of seats sold on aircraft flying the route fell to 23 per cent from 93 per cent once the new motorway opened between the two cities.

He added that the motorway journey now took two hours.