

The aviation sector is divided on how to reduce greenhouse gas

Twelve European countries oppose the International Civil Aviation Organization, which continues to lower its environmental requirements.

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International civil aviation goes its own way : it is not included in the Paris agreement on climate. The sector is however committed to establish its own plan of reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, representing 3% of global emissions to 2021. Negotiations were opened between the 192 Member countries of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which depends on the United Nations, but discussions are tense: a group of European countries threatening to withdraw its support for the text if the rules for the implementation of the Compensation program for the reduction of carbon from international aviation proposed by ICAO are relaxed again.

The warning follows the adoption in November 2017, of very weak measures on the nature of biofuels used. These will be introduced in order to make aviation less emitting GHGS and their effects will be recorded.

In late February, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria and Finland wrote to ICAO to state their reservations towards a further weakening of the future agreement. *Le Monde* had access to these documents. The letter from the French

Ministry of transport indicates that *"if States were questioning some aspects of the compromise achieved, particularly regarding emission units and sustainability of alternative fuels, the agreement given by the. France to this version of the text would be compromised"*.

1. Pressure of Brazil on biofuels

Germany, Poland, Romania, Portugal, Slovenia and Malta would also have sent similar opinion to ICAO, according to the NGO Transport and environment. All these States are trying to prevent relief from the rules which is growing each year, says Andrew Murphy, responsible for aviation for the Brussels-based NGO.

ICAO encourages its members to use biofuel to reduce their CO₂ emissions, while demanding that the fuel meets certain criteria. First generation agrofuels incorporating vegetable oils are indeed very criticized by advocates of the environment for their disastrous consequences - including deforestation - in producing countries, in particular the Malaysia and the Indonesia for Palm oil or Argentina and Brazil for soybeans. ICAO's rules could even be a valuable outlet for them. Indonesia, for example, has set for its aviation sector a target of 3% of palm oil incorporated in 2018 and by 5% in 2025.

Thus, the recommendations aimed at reducing the use of pesticides, respect human rights and the rights of labor, improve socio-economic conditions of the people living in the regions of cultures, avoid areas where biodiversity is protected, maintain the quality of land, water and air are preferred by many European countries.

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But in the fall of 2017, the ICAO Council (a subgroup of 36 Member States elected for three years) slashed ten of the twelve features of precautionary environmental and social framing biofuels, yet developed by its own technical Committee. The only requirements that remain require biofuel to issue 10% of GHG emissions less than kerosene and that it is not a product of land cleared after 1st January 2008.

It is especially Brazil that put pressure on ICAO's Council where it sits, in order to achieve these renunciations, according to Andrew Murphy. *"Brazil wants to sell its biofuel, and he foresaw that it would not meet the standards,"* he says. Russia, China, and Singapore have supported this approach, he adds, while the United States is not opposed.

2. Stringent compensation rules

If they fail to reach the objectives of reduction of GHG emissions, Member States may also acquire compensations, in other words invest in projects which carbon footprint is positive. However, here again, the letters to ICAO are conservative.

"The ambitious goal of ICAO (...)" will only happen if the projects generating emission units represent real, additional, permanent and verified gas reductions greenhouse and these reductions are counted only once", exposes the Belgian letter. This means that when the application of the compensation program for the reduction of carbon from international aviation, ICAO authorities should be careful to only accept compensation units that contribute actually in the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases, and which do not correspond to projects dating back several years. No way, for example, to validate a wind farm construction was actually already scheduled or a hydroelectric dam environmental impact overall would be negative. A strict application of these regulations will be essential, explains Norway representative in his letter, otherwise the credibility of the program who would suffer.

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