R11 No To Airport Expansions — Not in Barcelona, Not Anywhere

Proposer: Joves Ecosocialistes
Agenda item: 4. Resolutions

Motion text

In the context of climate emergency, when science and activists worldwide are urging for the decarbonisation of the global economy, the transport sector plays a major role. Specifically, air transport requires a massive reformulation effort. Despite the warnings –and obviousness– regarding the high impact of aviation on the environment, the operators of several major European airports are putting forward expansion proposals. Scaling up these facilities is in line with a strategy of growth in the aviation sector that is in clear contradiction with the need for decarbonisation. Once again, the economic powers and elites are making profit at the expenses of our rights to live in a healthy environment.

In Spain, the national airport operator AENA has put forward plans to expand virtually all major Spanish airports. In the case of Barcelona - El Prat Airport, the expansion project envisions a new terminal and the extension of one the airport’s three runways, with the goal of reaching 70 million passengers per year by 2030. The airport is located right by the Llobregat Delta, a space of critical ecological importance within the dense, heavily urbanized Barcelona conurbation. There are several swamps and two main lagoons around the airport area, one of which would be removed to allocate the runway extension. Overall, the Barcelona Airport expansion project would generate the following negative impacts:

- Massive biodiversity loss, as 43 protected bird species, fish and reptiles would be deprived of their natural ecosystem

- Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions coming from airport operations would surge by 33%, which go in the opposite direction of international agreements to reduce drastically overall emissions by 2030

- Direct health impact due to air and noise pollution generated by airport activity, such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, as well as an impact on the mental health of airport workers, passengers, and nearby residents; also, an indirect, global health impact from increased GHG emissions contributing to climate change worldwide should be considered.

- 10 million additional tourists would visit Barcelona annually, further increasing pressure on public services, and speeding up gentrification, directly impacting on the inhabitants' housing rights

- A model based on an unstoppable growth which benefits big companies fostering ecocide capitalism, undermining the very universal right to live in a habitable planet

- 1.7 billion euro would be lost to an unupdated and unsustainable transport system; instead this budget should be allocated to improve and expand the local rail network, with a focus on night trains and international connections—as of 2019, 54.5% of airport passengers could be provided with competitive rail alternatives

With this resolution, the Federation of Young European Greens:

- Call on the appropriate authorities and institutions to protect the environment and health by halting all expansion plans of all European airport operators, which constitute a threat for a green and just transition.

- Urge all European countries and institutions, specially those that are members of the European Union, to develop a competitive intra-european train network, creating new cross-border services through high-speed and night trains, with the goal of reducing airplane use.

- Urges the European Commission to halt all EU-funded subsidies to airlines and airport expansion projects of already developed airports

- Urges national European governments and European institutions to put forward a ban on air routes where a competitive rail alternative exists, as was already approved by France on national air routes where an alternative rail service with travel times under 2.5 hours is offered

- Call on the European Commission to create an air carbon tax that may be dynamically adjusted depending on the distance and the existence of competitive rail alternatives over the same route; the obtained revenue should be used to further develop competitive rail alternatives

- Call on civil society and local governments on showing their discontent with such projects and claim for a green and just transition

Reason

It may look like science fiction, but national administrations across Europe are still pushing for airport expansions. As air traffic is a major greenhouse gas (GHG) emitter, it makes no sense to keep subsidizing airlines and funding airport expansions; instead, all European institutions should coordinate to provide competitive rail alternatives on all major air routes across Europe. In the case of Barcelona Airport, the proposed expansion project envisions removing an entire lagoon in the Llobregat Delta, an area of the outmost ecological importance in the Barcelona metropolitan area.