FIRST COMMERCIAL FLIGHT LANDS AT SPANISH "GHOST AIRPORT"

News / Airports / Routes

Castellón airport, known as Spain's "ghost airport", received its first commercial passenger flight on Tuesday morning, nearly five years after it opened.

A Ryanair flight from London Stansted landed minutes before its scheduled arrival time at 10:40 a.m.

The airport has become an emblem of Spain's reckless boom-era infrastructure spending, which left the country mired in debt. Building and maintaining the facility has already cost taxpayers EUR170 million (125 million pounds). An investigation by the European Commission is underway to decide whether subsidies paid to the company SNC-Lavalin running the airport constitute illegal state aid.

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The fully booked flight, carrying 189 passengers, was the first of the Irish carrier's three weekly connections between the British capital and **Castellón airport**, close to Valencia.

Ryanair, which is the only company currently operating scheduled flights to the "ghost airport", will soon add a service from Bristol.

"It's a historic day", British passenger Raphael Dauchy told The Telegraph. Mr Dauchy, a 30-year-old consultant from London who regularly visits the Mediterranean town of Peñiscola, said the opening of the airport would be a "game-changer" for the region. "It will make a difference in giving Castellón province more international exposure, which it really needs as it is quite dependant on tourism. I thought it would never happen."

The airport was inaugurated in March 2011 by two politicians from Spain's ruling Popular Party, whose careers have since been curtailed by corruption cases.

Carlos Fabra, former Castellón provincial chief, is serving a four-year jail sentence for tax fraud, while ex-Valencia premier Francisco Camps resigned in 2011 to defend himself against accusations of accepting bribes.

A controversial EUR300,000 (220,000 pounds) sculpture believed to depict Mr Fabra still stands at the entrance to the airport.

Aerocas, the company set up by the Valencia government to run the facility, spent EUR35 million (26 million pounds) on advertising to promote the unused building. The money was mostly spent on shirt sponsorship deals with local football clubs Villarreal and Castellón.

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