Air transport: environmental impact, towards a sustainable development

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The Council held a policy debate on the basis of the Commission communication and then approved conclusions on the subject. The Council's discussions centred on the various questions raised in the Commission communication, in particular the aspects relating to the approval of a new international standard for aircraft noise by the ICAO in September 2001 and the economic incentives to be adopted to encourage the use of techniques and resources that are more environmentally friendly. The Council stressed the importance of concerted action to prepare for the ICAO Assembly in Montreal in September 2001. In that connection an exchange of views was also held on the problems relating to the taxation of aviation fuel. The Council invited the Commission, within the framework of its prerogatives, to continue its proceedings, taking into account not only the conclusions approved by the Council but also the points made in the course of the discussion. In its conclusions, the Council considers that refining the sectoral strategies is an ongoing process and that all parts of the economy should contribute to the overall objective of sustainable development; considers that in aviation, such a strategy should aim at achieving in the long term an improvement to this effect should also ensure a high level of safety, to avoid distortion of competition, safeguard air transport liberalisation, efficient functioning of the transport system and equitable access to transport services, and take account of the diversity of situations in the various regions of the Community, and, in particular, cohesion requirements. The Council considers that priority actions should include: - the development and early implementation of more stringent international noise standards as well as appropriate transitional arrangements for phasing out the noisiest aircraft, which should address the concerns of regions with high environmental requirements and pressing noise problems as well as those of the developing nations; - on the basis of a full analysis, proposals for the introduction of economic incentives for reducing the environmental impact, especially of gaseous emissions, of different aviation operations taking into account, inter alia, the need to avoid distortion of competition, the special nature of operations involving peripheral locations and the desirable contribution of voluntary agreements with the aviation industry; - the further development, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity and taking into account best practice, of a general Community framework of guidelines for the environmentally sustainable development of airports as an objective basis for measures to be taken by competent authorities in order to, in particular, meet the concerns of the population around airports.