European aerospace industry meeting the global challenge

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The ESC welcomes this document, and considers that the national industries are not generally capable, on their own, of standing up to world competition. The Commission's communication overlooks the need to back up industrial projects with vigorous action on uniform and Europe-wide vocational training. The structural funds should support a wide range of training activities for both young people who are to enter the aeronautics industry and retraining for those already employed in it. In order to inject flexibility into the system and boost employment, preference should be given to developing a network of small and medium-sized European businesses, which would trigger decentralization of a significant share of production and provide a technological spin-off for other sectors. The harnessing of relevant synergies, inter alia through universities and research centres, could be decisive here. The EU institutions and the individual Member States must give vigorous backing to the establishment of a European air safety authority and of an integrated air traffic control system. Special attention should be focused on environmental policy action, particularly regarding airports and their surrounding areas, by developing technologies capable of cutting air and noise pollution. The resources thus far available to specific RTD programmes will need to be expanded: in particular, this should be implemented under the Fifth framework programme. Technology transfer from the military to the civil sector and vice versa, supporting research on dual-use products, will be a decisive factor in this respect. Moreover, in order to support recently restructured European industries, the European Union should envisage funding joint programmes such as an integrated supervision/monitoring system (on an interdisciplinary sea-land-air-space basis) for safety in Europe as a whole, a military/civilian air transport system (FLA), or a satellite navigation system. Taking the three sectors as a whole (defence, space and aeronautics), the ESC believes that the EU must adopt instruments for funding and for adjusting public expenditure at European level. This will require a quantum jump in the EU political integration process. It is essential to secure a more efficient opening up of public procurement, so that the European aerospace industry can take advantage of new outlets.