Air transport: exemptions to agreements and concerted practices between the Community and third countries

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The Committee welcomes this initiative by the Commission to provide itself with the means necessary to fulfil its task of supervising the rules of competition in the same way as it does in other sectors. The Committee considers the capacity to carry out effective and uniform European-level checks on infringements of competition to be most important as it is only at this level that any influence can be brought to bear in the context of expanding world trade. In line with its earlier opinions, the Committee repeats its call for the application of the rules of competition to be accompanied by social demands. The Committee emphasizes the need to look into questions such as restricting flying time and taking account of safety and quality criteria in air transport, with particular reference to applying minimum training and qualification standards. The Committee reiterates its various proposals on making provision for consultation on socio-economic repercussions, so that the social implications of commercial agreements are taken into account. In order to encourage development in the regions and remote islands, and although reference is made to this in the Amsterdam Treaty, the Committee would welcome the Commission building upon the concept of public interest service in the air transport sector, in accordance with the third package rules, if appropriate under the new Article 7d of the Amsterdam Treaty and its interaction with the existing regulations. Lastly, the Committee favours extending the scope of Directive 3975/87 to all links with third countries as proposed and accompanying this extension of the remit to apply competition rules by correspondingly authorizing the Commission to grant block exemptions for these links, as part of a coherent European Union external policy in this field. Consequently, in the context of future developments, the Commission could receive from the Council a mandate to negotiate on these same links with third countries, in accordance with terms duly defined on the basis of consultations between the Commission, the Member States and the air transport industry.