The way forward for civil aviation in Europe

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The Commission has presented an action plan to rectify structural weaknesses in the European civil aviation system. This plan is based on two priorities: to eliminate the final obstacles to the single civil aviation market and to improve air transport infrastructures. 1) Completing the single market: - the Commission will continue action to complete the implementation of the third series of measures in the air transport sector; - application of competition rules: the Commission will apply fast and efficient procedures to establish informal contact prior to formal notification of cooperation agreements between carriers (while maintaining existing block exemptions), examine the possibility of laying down guidelines for the application of Articles 85 and 86 of the Treaty to various forms of cooperation between companies and re-examine existing mechanisms with a view to reducing administrative formalities; - tariffs: the Commission will maintain the existing block exemption for consultations, monitor the impact of these consultations on the market and take account of changes in costs when examining tariff movements; - time slots: the Commission will monitor the application of Regulation (EEC) No 95/93 closely and, if necessary, take any initiative required by market conditions before the review date (1 January 1996); - state aid: only aid which does not distort or threaten to distort the competition is acceptable. The Commission will adopt a decision on updating guidelines for the application of Articles 92 and 93 of the Treaty; - external relations: the Commission will take initiatives to ensure that EU carriers are entitled to serve third countries from Member States other than the state in which they are registered, endeavour to get national clauses in bilateral aeronautical agreements between Member States of the European Union replaced by a Community clause, table proposals concerning relations with other European countries in the air transport sector (giving priority to aeronautical relations with the central European countries with which the EU has concluded Europe agreements), continue exploratory discussions (especially with the United States) in order to identify areas in which joint action is possible, continue preparatory work on the administrative procedures to be applied in relation to external policy decisions in the aeronautical sector and work on criteria for allocating traffic rights obtained at Community level. - harmonization: the Commission will work on the creation of a single authority in charge of regulating air safety and will have a study carried out into aeronautical certification. 2) Improving air transport infrastructures: The Commission will: - speed up work on TEN air traffic control programmes, which will serve as a basis for using infrastructure funds; - help with preparatory work on a political and institutional framework for a single air traffic control system; - guarantee a major financial contribution from the Community in order to prepare a satellite air navigation system; - help strengthen and develop airport capacity and interconnect the airport network with the other networks; - guarantee a European contribution towards new airport capacity, especially in Milan, Berlin and Athens; - use regional policy instruments to improve airports in peripheral regions; - present a memorandum on the best way of guaranteeing non-discrimination, transparency and cost management in the provision of airport services; - take an initiative to liberalize groundhandling services in airports. A fair balance needs to be struck between various interests when implementing these recommendations. This applies in particular to social questions, environmental aspects and taxpayers' interests. - As regards taxation, the Commission does not favour special treatment for the air transport sector and intends to carry out a comparative economic study of companies' access to new financial instruments. - As regards the environment, the Commission feels that stricter European standards on noise and NOx emissions should not be introduced unilaterally. - As regards social aspects, the Commission feels that extensive restructuring is the best way of safeguarding and creating jobs and that a more flexible and more mobile workforce is needed.