Air traffic management: freeing europe's airspace. White paper

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OBJECTIVE: the White Paper begins by considering the background to the current situation as regards air traffic management (ATM) in Europe and the gaps in the existing arrangements, before going on to define a single ATM system for Europe and, lastly, putting forward what the Commission regards as the best institutional arrangement for the future. SUBSTANCE: In 1995 approximately 18.4% of intra-European flights were delayed by more than 15 minutes because of air traffic congestion and the situation is gradually worsening as the volume of air traffic continues to grow. Despite the aeronautical community's achievements (in particular the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC), Eurocontrol and the ICAO) and the quality of the programmes it has adopted, the prevailing conditions are not yet such as to enable the Community to develop an air-traffic management system which will satisfy the requirements of users and enable the Community to achieve its political objectives. There are a number of reasons which account for the inadequacy of the existing systems: the lack of a single, centralized structure, gaps in decision-making structures (the various systems operate in parallel), the lack of decision-making aids (absence of management information), inefficient use of available resources (proliferation of certain types of equipment, both civil and military, slowness of the standardization process); a lack of means of following up decisions, a lack of tools for implementation and support and, lastly, inadequate cost control (providers of ATM services have no incentive to seek cost-effectiveness and the concept of commercial management is extremely underdeveloped in the ATM sector). To remedy these shortcomings the Commission believes that a Europe-wide air traffic management system (i.e. one which stretches beyond national frontiers) should be set up on the basis of a separation between regulatory and operational tasks relating to air traffic flow management, with the management of airspace to be carried out on a centralized basis, whereas other operational tasks would continue to be the responsibility of the individual Member States. The Commission proposes that Eurocontrol should be 'reinvented' and restructured so that it can serve as a single regulatory authority for the whole of Europe. It considers that the new Eurocontrol should be given appropriate powers and resources as regards decision-making and supervision, whilst emphasizing that the Community should become a member of Eurocontrol so as to be able to exercise its powers therein. The Commission will put recommendations forward in the near future so as to enable the Community to become a member of a stronger Eurocontrol.