Air transport: environmental impact, towards a sustainable development

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PURPOSE : to present a communication on air transport and the environment to the European Parliament and the Council and the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions with the purpose of the future development of integrated policy action in the field. CONTENT : this communication analyses and identifies for the first time ways for coherent and integrated policy action for the European Union in the air transport field. To this end, reliance on better, preferably internationally agreed standards and rules needs to be complemented by a more effective system of EU-wide national, regional and local measures aimed at accelerating the introduction of environmentally-friendly technologies to reduce noise and gaseous emissions. It is also important that the European Union improves the promotion of its interests in the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). Furthermmore, this communication suggests the introduction of economic and regulatory incentives reinforcing the competitive edge of operators and users which choose to use state-of-art technologies and environmentally-friendly operations. It is proposed to expose Europe's air transport system much more to a system of "Reward the best - punish the worst" by drawing a clearer line between operations on the basis of their environmental quality. The air transport industry is invited to make, by means of establishing voluntary environmental agreements or otherwise, a pro-active contribution to reducing the environmental impact of its operations. It should be noted that local rules for implementation at the level of airports are part of a policy aimed at integrating in a coherent way environmental requirements into sectoral policies. Therefore, the work programme outlined in this communication includes measures to be applied at the level of airports in order t oreconcile the need for action on environmental grounds with the necessity to prevent distortive proliferation of local rules. The Commission intends to continue its work on the creation of the equitable conditions for competition within the overall transport system. This implies working towards integration of environmental costs into charging systems and significant improvement of the infrastructure at intermodal connecting points so that the users and operators can actually orient their choice towards the environmental quality of transport services and avoidance of congestion. This will contribute to replacing shorter flights by truly competitive rail transport. This communication constitues the point of reference for the Commission's work programme during the next 5 years and beyond. On the basis of results in ICAO by the end of 2001, the Commission will present a re-assessment of the balance between global, Community and local measures with a view to ensuring fulfilment of the environmental goals laid down in the Amsterdam Treaty and the Kyoto-Protocol and update priorities, where required, by lack of progress at international level and/or new scientific evidence on environmental impacts of air transport.