Air transport safety, civil aviation: Community improvement strategy

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OBJECTIVE: The Commission's working document seeks to define a strategy to enhance safety standards to be imposed on Community airlines and all third-country airlines operating in the EU. SUBSTANCE: The document provides in particular for the establishment of a European Aviation Safety Authority instructed to develop methods enabling systematic and efficient checks to be carried out on the safety of Community airlines, especially airlines flying third-country flags. Before the end of the year, the Commission will submit a formal proposal for the establishment of an authority of that nature. The action plan drawn up by the Commission, in cooperation with Member State experts, provides for measures to be taken at three levels; (a) by the Member States: they should immediately take the measures necessary to expand their national safety oversight activities and make them consistent with the collective assessment procedure; (b) the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) and its associated body, the Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA) should rapidly finalize a comprehensive and workable Safety Assessment Procedure, establish a coordination mechanism for the centralization and dissemination of information received and prepare syntheses on foreign air carriers whose safety levels are suspect, set up specialist assessment teams for the audit of foreign air carriers and set up a European cooperation programme to assist third countries in improving their safety oversight capabilities; (c) by the European Commission itself: it says that it will present before the end of the year a proposal for a directive formalizing the safety assessment procedure to be followed by the Member States for the assessment of foreign air carriers. That directive should also include an obligation on Member States to ground aircraft found or suspected to be dangerous.