Relations with the Russian Federation and China in the field of air transport

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PURPOSE : to present a framework for developing relations with the Russian Federation in the field of air transport.

CONTENT : the aviation and aeronautical industries of the EU and the Russian Federation are fundamental components of economic cooperation contributing to the mobility of citizens and to industrial development. The importance of the Russian Federation and EU aviation relations increased with the enlargement of the EU and traffic between the markets of the EU-25 and the Russian Federation grew significantly. Nevertheless, the full potential of the internal market is unlikely to be achieved until the Community acts as a single coordinated entity in its aviation relations with third countries wherever such co-ordinated efforts can create added value in the interest of the European aviation industry and users.

This paper presents the background and arguments substantiating the need for a comprehensive air transport agreement between the Community and the Russian Federation, which would allow the two partners to establish a clear and coherent framework in which to constructively develop their aviation relations in the coming years.

Furthermore, in parallel to this Communication, the Commission therefore recommends that the Council authorise the Commission to negotiate, on behalf of the European Community, a comprehensive air transport agreement with the Russian Federation.

Such a framework would inter alia aim to improve market opportunities for both sides, ensure compliance with Community law, implement a phase-out of trans-Siberian overflight payments, promote the approximation of aviation laws where appropriate, establish joint mechanisms for co-operation on security, safety and environmental standards, and foster co-operation in the industrial field. It would also bring about significant economic benefits.

The current situation whereby each Member State separately, and not the Community, negotiates air traffic rights and access conditions with third countries is a clear handicap. As long as Member States negotiate bilaterally with Russia it will be considerably more difficult to achieve the significant benefits in terms of market access and integration, which the Community would expect to achieve, together with offering substantial opportunities for cooperation in the regulatory, technical and industrial fields.

A comprehensive EC-Russia air transport agreement would provide for a transition period for the modernisation of the current mechanism of payments for trans-Siberian overflights by 2013 at the latest and ensure that charges applied after the end of the transition period will be transparent, cost-based and not lead to discrimination between airlines.