

EU/Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Kosovo*

Multilateral Agreement: European Common Aviation Area (ECAA)

2006/0036(NLE) - 14/03/2006 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to sign and conclude a Multilateral Agreement between the EU and eight Balkan countries plus Iceland and Norway on the Establishment of a European Common Aviation Area (ECAA).

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

CONTENT: since 1996, the Commission has been striving to consolidate the European Common Aviation Area or ECAA. To recall, the purpose of the ECAA is to open up markets between Europe and its neighbours and to offer ECAA signatories the benefits of an internal market in the field of aviation. In other words, the ECAA is a multi-lateral agreement offering full market opening in terms of access, capacity, fares and the freedom of establishment without nationality clauses as well as an alignment with Community legislation on safety, security and air-traffic management matters. Initial negotiations from 1996 onwards focused on the then ten applicant countries. Following their accession in May 2004, the Commission's focus has shifted towards the Balkan region.

The text of the multilateral agreement has been accepted by: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the European Community, Iceland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Montenegro, Romania and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

Following extensive negotiations these countries have agreed to align their national aviation legislation with that of the EU's. The Commission suggests that this development acts as a major step forward. In future air transport will play a key role in both the economic and political integration of Europe.

Upon adoption of the proposed Council Decisions the existing bilateral air service agreements between the Member States and the ECAA partners will, to a large extent, cease to exist and be substituted by one single Community Agreement. In addition, the text of the Agreement has been simplified. For instance, competition issues will henceforth be dealt with through the Stabilisation and Association Process. In terms of its structure, a common "multilateral main text" forms the basis of the ECAA. This text will be obligatory to all signatories. A series of Protocols have been added which accommodating the specific need of each country, including appropriate transitional arrangements. Lastly, an Annex lists all of the EU's aviation acts applicable within the ECAA.