EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 10.8.2016
C(2016) 5297 final

Dear Speaker,

The Commission would like to thank the Riksdag for its Opinion on the Communication "An Aviation Strategy for Europe" {COM(2015) 598 final}.

This Communication forms part of the Aviation Strategy, whose overall objective is to shape a comprehensive strategy for the whole EU aviation ecosystem. By doing so, the strategy aims to generate growth, foster innovation and enable passengers to profit from safer, environmentally-friendly and cheaper flights. It contributes directly to the Commission's priorities of Jobs and Growth, the Digital Single Market, an Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy and the EU as a global actor.

The Commission welcomes the Riksdag's support for the aims of the strategy, especially with regard to providing the EU aviation sector with a framework that ensures that the sector remains competitive and reaps the benefits of a fast-changing and developing global economy. It shares the Riksdag's view on aviation as a strong driver of economic growth, jobs, trade and mobility as well as on the importance of prioritising high standards in the fields of safety, security, environment, working conditions and passenger rights. Finally, the Commission thanks the Riksdag for highlighting the need for a collective effort to implement the strategy.

In this respect, the Commission welcomes the efforts being made by Sweden to draw up a national aviation strategy that sets out the long-term conditions for the development of the Swedish aviation sector within and beyond the country's borders. In its Communication, the Commission also considers it necessary to ensure better strategic planning at EU level and welcomes the work of the European Observatory on Airport Capacity and Quality, which has in particular recommended that airport strategic planning frameworks are developed in each Member State. The Commission also shares the Riksdag's view that national and European strategies together can help to achieve the objective of an aviation sector which is sustainable in the long-term.

Mr Urban AHLIN
Speaker of the Riksdag
SE – 100 12 STOCKHOLM

The Commission notes the specific concerns expressed by the Riksdag in relation to the full implementation of the Single European Sky, the way regional airports and their funding are addressed, the emergence of certain employment conditions in the aviation sector and last but not least, the contribution of aviation to a resilient Energy Union and a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy. The Commission is pleased to have this opportunity to provide a number of clarifications regarding its proposal in the attached Annex.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Riksdag and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Violeta Bulc

Member of the Commission

The Commission has carefully considered each of the issues raised by the Riksdag in its Opinion and is pleased to offer the following clarifications.

On the Single European Sky:

The Commission shares the Riksdag's view that the Single European Sky (SES) project is still not fully delivering. Despite some achievements towards a better performing network, the level of fragmentation in the provision of air navigation services is still significant and the technology used is not harmonised or state-of-the-art.

As an important step towards unleashing this potential for the EU aviation sector, the Commission has urged the European Parliament and the Council to adopt the Single European Sky proposals (SES2+)[1] in order to ensure the effectiveness of functional airspace blocks and network functions as well as the swift implementation of the EU-wide targets for the performance scheme that is based on a fully independent performance review body.

The efficient governance of the SES remains a priority for the Commission. The respective tasks of the European Aviation Safety Agency and Eurocontrol will be defined in a manner that ensures that both organisations complement each other's tasks, so that overlaps can be avoided and costs reduced. Moreover, the tasks of the Network Manager in co-ordinating air traffic flow management at the European level will gradually be expanded to include common services that will further reduce costs.

The SES air traffic management Research project (SESAR) will contribute towards the technological modernisation of air traffic management (ATM) by defining, developing and deploying the technological solutions needed to increase its performance. It is important to implement and deploy technological solutions in a timely and coordinated manner. A number of implementing instruments have been developed, such as the air traffic management Master Plan[2], Common Projects[3] and the Deployment Programme[4]. They are implemented through public-private partnerships, notably the SESAR Joint Undertaking for the definition and development activities and the SESAR deployment framework partnership for deployment. Both development and deployment activities require appropriate financial support. So far, the EU is contributing through programmes such as Horizon 2020 and the Connecting Europe Facility.

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[1] COM(2013) 409 final ; COM(2013) 410 final.

[2] ATM Master Plan Edition 2015: ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/sesar/doc/eu-atm-master-plan-2015.pdf

[3] Implementing Regulation (EU) No 716/2014 of 27 June 2014 on the establishment of the Pilot Common Project supporting the implementation of the European Air Traffic Management Master Plan Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 190, 28.6.2014, pp. 19-44.

[4] Deployment Programme 2015: http://www.sesardeploymentmanager.eu/deployment-programme-2015-edition-november-available/

On regional airports:

The Commission recognises the important role regional airports play in the EU aviation ecosystem. They help ensure a well-connected and balanced aviation network and contribute to economic growth, jobs and provide essential air services in areas where access by other means is limited, thereby strengthening regional and economic cohesion.

The Commission adopted new Aviation State Aid Guidelines[5] in 2014 which aim to ensure the mobility of European citizens through good connections between regions while at the same time limiting distortions of competition that would undermine a level playing field in the Single Market, in particular by avoiding the creation of idle extra airport capacity (so-called 'ghost airports') or duplicating existing under-used airport infrastructure.

In particular, the new guidelines allow for operating aid to airports with annual passenger traffic between 700 000 and 3 million passengers with a phasing-out period of 10 years, instead of the general ban foreseen in the 2005 Guidelines. As to airports with fewer than 700 000 passengers a year, operating aid is allowed until 2019 and the situation will be reviewed by 2018, notably to determine whether operating aid should be allowed for a further period. State aid for investment in airport infrastructure is also allowed if there is a genuine transport need and the public support is necessary to ensure the accessibility of a region. The new guidelines define maximum permissible aid intensities depending on the size of the airport, in order to ensure the right mix between public and private investment. The possibilities to grant aid are therefore higher for smaller airports than for larger ones. The Commission's main enforcement priority is now to make sure that any aid granted to airports or airlines as of the entry into force of the guidelines (April 2014) complies with them.

These guidelines, together with interpretative guidelines on Public Service Obligations to be adopted by the Commission later this year, should bring clarity to undertakings and investors on how to apply existing rules.

On 'Reinforcing the social agenda':

The Commission shares the view that pressure on airlines to reduce operational costs has been significant during recent years. Network carriers have outsourced some of their activities to improve productivity and profitability in the context of restructuring. Against this background, the Commission updated its analysis on employment and working conditions in air transport and airports. The latter confirmed that, since the completion of the aviation internal market in the late 1990s, the sector's direct employment has remained stable despite the market's fast expansion. This is mainly due to productivity rising rapidly and the increase of outsourcing, which now also extends to core airline activities.

The Commission has taken action to tackle social issues in air transport, as stressed in the Aviation Strategy. Whilst acknowledging the emergence of new business and employment models, it specifically addresses the situation of highly mobile workers who have their home

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[5] Communication from the Commission – Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines, OJ C 99, 4.4.2014, pp. 3-34.

base located outside the territory where the airline is licensed, by envisaging a clarification of the applicable labour law and the competent court in charge of disputes.

Other Commission initiatives for 2016 include its engagement in a debate with EU authorities, social partners, civil society and citizens on the Social Pillar as well as the establishment of a European Platform to enhance Member States' cooperation in tackling undeclared work, covering all forms of undeclared (and falsely declared) work, including bogus self-employment.

The impact of working conditions on flight safety is an area that is under careful consideration by the Commission. In this context, in April 2015, the European Aviation Safety Agency Rule-Making Advisory Group prepared a report with recommendations, including that the management systems of an airline should capture new safety hazards that may be introduced by different employment models. The recommendations of the group have been included in the 2016-2020 edition of the European Plan for Aviation Safety[6]. The work is continuing with a focus on implementing these recommendations so that the correct supporting safety advice is given to concerned stakeholders. Furthermore, the Commission's proposal for a new aviation safety Regulation[7] promotes joint and cooperative oversight between Member States which would facilitate overseeing operators using new business models.

On 'The contribution of aviation to a resilient Energy Union and a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy':

The EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) is considered to be the cornerstone of EU climate change policies, as recognised by the European Council in its conclusions of October 2014. The EU ETS currently applies to aviation activities within all 28 Member States as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway and has succeeded in achieving very high compliance rates (over 99.5% of emissions) and emission reductions of around 16 million tonnes every year. The inclusion of emissions trading schemes applying to domestic aviation activities are being implemented in some other countries such as South Korea and China.

As stated in the Communication, achieving a successful outcome on the Global Market-Based Measure at the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Assembly in September/October 2016 is a high priority for Europe and will be decisive for the way in which CO_2 emissions from aviation will be addressed in the future.

On drones:

The Commission shares the Riksdag's view that drone operations and the underlying drone technologies urgently need common rules to deliver a genuine EU drone services market. In order to maintain a high safety level and societal acceptance, identification of the drone operator is a key objective and is one of the priorities for the Commission.

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[6] http://www.easa.europa.eu/system/files/dfu/EPAS%202016-2020%20FINAL.PDF
[7] COM(2015) 613 final.