EU and ICAO launch closer collaboration on civil aviation issues

The Joint Committee established under the recently signed Memorandum of Cooperation between the European Union and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) met for the first time on 21 September 2011 in a move to formally launch the enhanced cooperation between both organisations. The meeting was co-chaired by the European Commission's Director General Matthias Ruete and ICAO's Secretary General Raymond Benjamin.

On 4 May the EU Presidency and the European Commission signed on behalf of the EU a Memorandum of Cooperation with ICAO to create a framework for closer cooperation in the fields of safety, security, air traffic management and environment. The approval of the EU-ICAO MoC is currently under discussion in the European Parliament. In the mean time, the MoC is being applied on a provisional basis. Under the provisions of the Memorandum of Cooperation a Joint Committee has been established to administer its effective functioning, and this first meeting is a milestone in putting into effect this Memorandum of Cooperation.

One of the specific areas referred to concerns the adoption and signature of a working arrangement between the EU and ICAO in the field of accident and incident reporting. Formalising collaboration in this field will facilitate a better collection, sharing and analysis of aviation safety information, which ultimately will lead to improvements in aviation safety.

In the working arrangement the European Commission has committed itself to promote the use of the ICAO categorization scheme as the standard for reporting and exchanging accident and incident information within the EU. ICAO, on the other hand, will promote the use of European Co-ordination Centre for Accident and Incident Reporting Systems (ECCAIRS) software, developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, for the collection of accident and incident information to its Contracting States. Finally, in relation to the use of ECCAIRS software, both the European Commission and ICAO will share and harmonize their training and supporting efforts and material for the benefit of all ECCAIRS end-users.

Early inroads were also made with regards to similar working arrangements being established for consolidating the organisations' work with regard to safety oversight through their respective audit programmes. The meeting was used to review the preparations for the ICAO hosted symposium on Regional Safety Oversight Organisations that will take place on 26-28 October, to which Europe's contribution is particularly welcome in view of its efforts to consolidate its regional safety oversight capacity.

The meeting furthermore explored other avenues whereby Europe could contribute to and work with ICAO. Initial emphasis has been put on aviation safety, but both sides see value in pursuing further reflection on possible collaboration in the other areas covered by the Memorandum of Cooperation.