Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1341 (2003)[1]

European air transport policies: crucial choices at a critical time

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The air transport industry, both in Europe and worldwide, has suffered greatly since the tragic events of 11 September 2001, as public apprehension over terrorist attacks in the air has risen and persisted. Other factors which have discouraged demand for air transport include the slowdown in world economic activity resulting from, inter alia, the crisis in the "new economy"; political tension and the resulting rise in energy prices associated with the Iraq crisis and its aftermath, and reduced tourism and business travel following the feared spread of Sars (severe acute respiratory syndrome).

2. These developments have left many major European air carriers in a precarious economic situation, especially due to the fact that any overcapacity or organisational deficiency they may have accumulated over the past years of strong demand have now been exposed. Stiff competition from new low-cost carriers, offering much-reduced prices, has brought about an entirely new market situation. The arrival of these new carriers presents advantages for travellers who now have access to air transport at a modest price. This should not, however, be detrimental to either social regulations or security.

3. Air traffic delays – considered a major problem before the developments referred to above – have eased considerably, not only as a result of reduced demand for air transport but also following strenuous efforts by the European Civil Aviation Conference (Ecac), the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation (Eurocontrol) and the European Union to improve air traffic management (ATM). In anticipation of expected resumed strong growth in air transport demand in future years, the Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the ratification by fourteen countries of the revised Eurocontrol Convention and the gradual implementation of Eurocontrol's ATM Strategy for the years 2000 +, which will increasingly use satellite navigation technology. It calls for the convention's rapid ratification by all member states to permit it to enter into force.

4. The Assembly believes that the European Union's recent accession to Eurocontrol can usefully assist in this process, and in the realisation of the European Union's own Single European Sky (SES) Project, provided due regard is given to Eurocontrol's prerogatives and expertise in running the project on the basis of its wider European membership, as well as to national sensitivities of a military or social nature. The Assembly draws attention to the human factor behind many air accidents, such as that over southern Germany in August 2002 when two planes collided in mid-air, and stresses the corresponding need to ensure common, pan-European professional standards among air safety personnel such as air traffic controllers. The search for positive financial results cannot be obtained through socially regressive policies.

5. The Assembly, recalling its Recommendation 1549 (2002) on air transport and terrorism: how to enhance security?, welcomes the implementation of stringent security measures against terrorism under European Union Regulation (EC) No. 2320/2002 establishing common rules in the field of civil aviation security, and Ecac's Document 30 and audit programme using on-site inspections at airports. It also draws attention to new threats, such as portable missiles fired against aircraft in the vicinity of airports and to the need for Council of Europe member states and others to counter this menace, such as by installing missile-deflecting devices on planes.

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1. Assembly debate on 27 June 2003 (24th Sitting) (see Doc. 9823, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Masseret). Text adopted by the Assembly on 27 June 2003 (24th Sitting).

6. Finally, the Assembly hopes that the Russian Federation, as a Council of Europe member state, will soon be in a position to join Ecac and Eurocontrol and thereby make its full contribution to European civil aviation.