Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1500 (2006)[1]

The need to enhance European air safety

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Air transport accidents have on the whole become very rare in Europe, a development all the more remarkable in the light of the growing number of aircraft in operation. Thus, with one third of global traffic, Europe accounts for only one tenth of accidents worldwide. Nevertheless, a spate of accidents in recent years has caused considerable concern over aviation safety in Europe.

2. Central to aviation safety is the proper functioning of safety maintenance and control procedures, on the one hand, and air traffic management (ATM) systems, on the other. With regard to the former, the danger is that relentless price competition may lead to desperate cost-cutting measures on the part of airlines, which could have serious consequences for the upholding of aviation safety standards. While increasing competition is to be welcomed in the interests of the consumer, this implies greater responsibility on the part of the appropriate authorities and organisations for ensuring that safety standards are maintained and improved.

3. Apart from the need to continuously strengthen general air safety maintenance standards, more stringent rules are needed with a view to making so-called "ramp inspections", or unannounced safety checks, mandatory. Remaining differences in national safety standards and practices in greater Europe should be harmonised through the co-ordinated efforts, already substantial, of the 42-member state European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC), its associated body the Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA), the institutions of the European Union, notably the European Agency for Aviation Safety (EASA), and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

4. With regard to ATM, the European system will hardly be able to cope with increasingly congested skies and airports unless it undergoes serious reform. In this connection, the Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the adoption in March 2004 of the European Union's Single European Sky (SES) initiative, an ambitious regulatory undertaking which aims to meet future capacity needs and to improve and reinforce aviation safety in the European skies by restructuring the airspace and improving the efficiency of the ATM system. It seeks to do this in a co-ordinated and integrated manner, so as to reduce fragmentation as between states and systems, on the one hand, and as between civil and military aviation, on the other. The Assembly considers it essential that the SES be extended, through negotiated agreements, to cover the entire European airspace.

5. The Assembly calls for the greatest possible degree of transparency with respect to the public and for the sharing between authorities of information concerning aviation safety. In this connection it welcomes the adoption and publication in March 2006 of the first European Union (EU) blacklist of unsafe airlines that are banned in the EU, the decision by the ICAO to publish the results of the organisation's Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) and the agreement by the ICAO and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to share safety-related information from their respective audit programmes to better identify potential safety risks and prevent aircraft accidents.

6. The Assembly welcomes the Global Strategy for Aviation Safety approved by the ICAO Directors General of Civil Aviation at their conference held in Montreal from 20 to 22 March 2006, designed to achieve significant improvements and develop a safety framework for the 21st century.

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee acting on behalf of the Assembly on 29 May 2006 (see Doc. 10912, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Anders G. Högmark).

7. While aviation safety is concerned with the rules for aircraft construction and operation, aviation security aims at preventing unlawful interference with the use of aircraft. Ultimately, both aim to preserve the maximum possible safety and integrity of flying passengers. The Assembly welcomes the adoption by Council of Europe member states and by the European Union of measures designed to enhance aviation security, but stresses that they should be harmonised and recalls that all such measures must fully comply with the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5). Moreover, the Assembly considers that the method of financing and the cost effectiveness of such measures should be fully studied, in particular with a view to assessing their impact on smaller airports.

8. The Assembly also stresses the importance of countries and airports giving advance notice with regard to the application of new security measures in order to reduce indirect costs for passengers and aviation operators. Moreover, the Assembly underlines the need to establish European common principles of good practice for security staff dealing with passengers at airports. These could then serve as a model beyond Europe.

9. The public is increasingly concerned about the environmental impact of air transport, in particular noise pollution and deteriorating local air quality, but also about global warming caused by aircraft emissions. The Assembly believes that reduction and management of aircraft noise requires a balanced approach, such as that endorsed by the ICAO, designed to address the local noise problem in the most cost-efficient and transparent manner, and based on solutions tailored to the specific characteristics of the airport and communities concerned. Conflicts engendered by flights over transfrontier communities to and from airports located close to national frontiers should be managed where possible in the first instance by the communities involved through cross-border agreements concluded in the framework of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (ETS No. 106) and its protocols (ETS Nos. 159 and 169), in consultation with the responsible national and European civil aviation authorities.

10. The Assembly welcomes efforts to improve local air quality, including legislation based on increasingly stringent international standards, economic incentives and disincentives (such as pollution taxes and differential landing charges), the promotion of research, and technological improvements.

11. As for global warming, the Assembly supports the proposals of the European Commission, also endorsed by the ECAC and the ICAO, to include aviation in the European Union's Greenhouse Gas Emission Trading Scheme (EU ETS) designed to help meet the targets set under the Kyoto Protocol.

12. Regarding air passenger health, although in-flight medical incidents are uncommon, they are likely to rise in the coming years unless additional efforts are made. Reasons for this include the forecast growth in air travel, the increasing number of older passengers, and the development of long-haul aircraft to carry larger numbers of passengers over longer flight times. The Assembly welcomes the publication by the ECAC of its Manual on air passenger health issues, supported internationally by the ICAO, which contains recommendations concerning medical incident reporting, provision for health-related services both on flights and at airports, legal aspects and information for passengers. The Assembly welcomes co-operation between the World Health Organization (WHO) and aviation organisations such as the ECAC, the ICAO and the IATA to develop guidelines designed to combat transmission of avian influenza and other communicable diseases.

13. Finally, the Assembly calls on the members states of the Council of Europe which are not members of the European Union to:

13.1. join the ECAC if they have not yet done so;

13.2. commit themselves to carrying out ramp inspections under the ECAC/JAA Safety Assessment of Foreign Aircraft Programme (SAFA) on a mandatory basis;

13.3. align their aviation safety and security legislation and their air traffic management systems with those of the European Union, so that the Single European Sky initiative becomes a reality over all of greater Europe.