

ECAC's 42nd Plenary (Triennial) Session

Strasbourg, 9 July 2024

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Mr President of the ICAO Council,

Mr President of the European Civil Aviation Conference, Distinguished Members of the ICAO Council,

Madam Secretary General,

Directors General from the ECAC States and representatives from other regions

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and honoured to have been invited to address you at the opening of this Plenary meeting. For me, this is a clear signal of the excellent relations the European Commission, and DG MOVE in particular, enjoys with ECAC, under the leadership of Alessio and Patricia. In essence, ECAC and the EU are two emanations of the same European spirit. ECAC provides an excellent framework for Directors General of Civil Aviation to meet and to reflect, and to do so in a pan-European setting. The EU from its side provides a big single aviation market, with a modern common legal framework in almost all aspects of aviation, and a special close relationship with most non-EU ECAC members. And in a number of areas the legislative action of the EU was based on earlier work within ECAC, as was notably the case with regard to aviation security.

But nowhere is this symbiosis more fruitful and of bigger importance than in our joint actions at ICAO. The substantive contributions of both the EU as well as ECAC to important meetings of ICAO take the format of joint Working Papers, which are each time very influential documents wherever ICAO meets. I want to take this occasion to pay tribute to all officials from the ECAC Secretariat, at the Commission

and in all our capitals who make this joint work at ICAO possible. It is thanks to their expertise and relentless efforts that time and again we jointly manage to be as effective and influential. And I also want to pay tribute to the important work done by the Representatives of the EU and ECAC States on the ICAO Council.

We are fully in the process of preparations for the upcoming 14th Air Navigation Conference for which in the past weeks a number of very good joint Working Papers have been submitted. All of them point at concrete files for which we think action at ICAO is necessary, and many of them outline the best possible way to get there. Many of them enjoy co-sponsorship from other regions.

We need to progress the technological modernisation of air navigation in order to continue to deliver the necessary capacity for growing traffic, and the arrival of new entrants – whether it is at very low or very high altitude, whether it is manned or unmanned aircraft. I wish all of you who will attend the Conference a lot of success.

Of course, we should already now set our eyes on the 42nd Assembly, of which we know that it will come at a challenging time for international aviation.

The first of our joint tasks will be the election of the 8 Council candidates which Europe proposes in the ICAO Council. A crucial factor in that effort will be unity around 8 candidates. And the earlier this unity is found, the earlier we will be able to focus on all our other priorities. From my perspective, we need every prospective member of the ICAO Council to be among the best in the business, and to be fully committed to playing an influential role at ICAO by being permanently based in Montreal. This is crucial to continue efficiently defend our joint interests and ensure a good European coordination under the co-leadership of the European Union.

Another important question for the Assembly will be the role of Russia in the Council. Each and every of the reasons which the 41st Assembly had for not electing Russia are still valid or have gotten worse. Aviation in Russia has become even more unsafe, a considerable number of aircraft remain stolen and improperly certified, and all of these continue to constitute grave breaches of the Chicago Convention. Russia continues to over-politicise the work of the ICAO and showed disrespect to its work and procedures, including through its withdrawal from the MH 17 case. We don't believe that a state which shows so much disrespect for the ICAO Council belongs on the ICAO Council!

I am happy to learn that ECAC Directors General, with the Commission, have started their reflection on what Europe should bring in terms of substantive files and preoccupations to the next Assembly. The issue of jamming and spoofing of GNSS signals is a growing problem, especially on Europe's Eastern flank, and a direct threat to the safety of aviation, which would need to be addressed at the upcoming Air Navigation Conference but also the Assembly. There will be other themes such as cybersecurity or the fight against the instrumentalization of international aviation for human trafficking and illegal migration.

Environmental sustainability will continue to be an important topic too. We think that there is room for the strengthening of CORSIA and we need to start addressing at the level of ICAO the scientific understanding and the mitigation of the non-CO2 climate impact of aviation. Also, referring to sustainable fuels, the very broadly supported achievements of CAAF/3 should find a way into the Climate Change resolution. In the past, environmental action was seen as the indispensable licence to grow for the aviation sector. We should realise that in the meantime in many countries and amongst many citizens, including in Europe, environmental action has in fact become the licence to operate. There is thus no other choice than to continue tackling, ambitiously, the environmental impact of aviation!

As to the Assembly, the last point I want to make is that we should be ready to listen to and reflect together with our partners in other regions of the world. The European Union is strongly committed to ICAO No Country Left Behind Initiative and is strongly supporting many states around the world be it on safety, security and environment. I had the pleasure of being at ICAO two weeks ago where I signed a new cooperation agreement with ICAO on capacity building and implementation support. We look forward to work closely with our African colleagues, through our co-operation with AFCAC. [*I am very happy that we have the President and the vice-President of AFCAC with us today*]. The same applies of course to our friends in LACAC and in AACO, [*also represented here*]. ICAO is about global action: if we can't convince our friends in other continents of the merits of working together, then this global action is just not going to happen. I count on all of us working together as much as we can in the preparation of and during the 42nd Assembly.

Dear colleagues,

Let me finish with a few words about the EU. Indeed, many people approach me in search of insights into what to expect from the new European Parliament and the next European Commission, including at yesterday's very friendly reception.

I am of course not in the position to speculate about the political agenda of the next Commission, which has not even been nominated yet. It will be set out in the political priorities of the Commission President designate, Mrs von der Leyen – actually next week right here in Strasbourg.

Let me only highlight a few elements for reflection:

- The objectives to achieve decarbonisation and the digital transition will certainly remain high on the agenda and we will need to ensure the proper implementation of the regulatory framework that was set in motion in the previous mandate. This includes also a number of files directly addressing the aviation sector;
- In this sense, the objectives and the roadmap provided by the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy remain valid and even though the vast majority of actions proposed under the strategy have already started, further work is necessary to complete its delivery;
- Sadly, the EU has faced a number of crises in the past five years and we continue to experience the impacts of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. It is therefore clear that the security, resilience and preparedness are expected to gain in political importance. That means strengthening our industrial and technological autonomy, and our energy independence.
- Securing the eastern flank of Europe is vital for our future. This means making sure that the Ukraine Facility delivers on strengthening infrastructure links with the EU. It also means helping our Ukrainian colleagues, and our colleagues in Moldova, to align their legal and business environment with that of the EU, on the path towards enlargement, together with the countries of the Western Balkans.
- As you know, the next Commission will also put forward a proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU, that will start in 2028. It's too early to communicate on these issues but it is fair to reflect on the importance of mobilising the different levers to support the transport sector, being through EU funding, Recovery and Resilience Facility, Member States'

funding but also private investments, including through Public-Private Partnerships or Joint Undertakings in research.

Well-functioning transport, and aviation, is not a 'nice to have'. It is a must, if we are serious about gearing up Europe to face known – and unknown – crises, and about boosting its competitiveness.

We will all need to see how things develop in the coming months, but rest assured that there are no indications that the EU's strong and positive engagement with ECAC and with ICAO would in any way change.

Thank you for your attention and let's have a very fruitful Plenary meeting!