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Delegations will find attached a copy of the above-mentioned opinion.

**Committee of the Regions****COTER-VI/011****119th plenary session, 10, 11 and 12 October 2016****OPINION****Aviation Strategy****THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

- draws attention to the fact that the local and regional authorities have a crucial role to play in the development of airports and of aviation, by virtue of their responsibility for the population's quality of life, environmental conditions, and the spatial and physical planning involved;
- supports the proposal to develop strategic planning for the management of airport capacity at EU level in a situation where there are shortages at a number of large airports, while at the same time a large number of airports are underused;
- notes that the conditions for a region's development largely depend on the quality of its connectivity. From the regional perspective, good connectivity is the primary benefit that the aviation sector is expected to deliver;
- regrets the fact that the Commission has not highlighted the role of regional airports and their importance for aviation development in the strategy. The balanced approach which the Commission intends to adopt under the Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines (OJ C 99, 4.4.2014, p. 3) should take account of the need for regional development and connectivity for all Europe's regions, especially sparsely populated, peripheral and outermost regions, where there is an obvious risk of regional needs not being met by the market;
- sees great potential for the use of drones at local and regional level, not least in more sparsely populated parts of Europe, and it supports the ambition of putting Europe in a leading position in the development of drone technology and use. The Committee of the Regions would like to see basic risk-based, harmonised regulation of all drone use at EU level, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, and it underlines the need for dialogue between EASA and relevant players at national, regional and local level within the Member States.

Rapporteur

Ulrika Carlefall Landergren (SE/ALDE), Member of Kungsbacka Municipal Council

Reference documents

Communication on "An Aviation Strategy for Europe" COM (2015) 598 final;
Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication on "An Aviation Strategy for Europe"
SWD (2015) 261 final;

Proposal for a Regulation on common rules in the field of civil aviation and establishing a European Union Aviation Safety Agency and repealing Regulation (EC) No 216/2008 COM (2015) 613 final

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions - Aviation Strategy

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. shares the Commission's assessment of the aviation sector's importance for economic growth, jobs, trade and mobility both within and outside the European Union. The aviation sector itself is a significant economic activity that generates a large number of jobs;
2. would also underline the social significance of the aviation sector, as well as its great importance for territorial cohesion, not least because it can give peripheral and sparsely populated regions, including islands and outermost regions, access to larger common markets and cultural exchange. The Committee of the Regions considers a competitive European aviation sector that is sustainable in the long term as essential for development at both local and regional level;
3. like the Commission, also sees the need for an overall aviation strategy in view of the structural changes that have taken place in the international aviation market in recent years, and supports the aim of the strategy, namely to support the mobility of EU citizens, to strengthen competitiveness and to achieve ecological, economic and social sustainability throughout the value chain for the EU aviation sector;
4. draws attention to the fact that the local and regional authorities have a crucial role to play in the development of airports and of aviation, by virtue of their responsibility for the population's quality of life, environmental conditions, and the spatial and physical planning involved. Continued sustainable development of aviation in Europe, with more efficient use and expansion of airport capacity, requires open, transparent and trusting collaboration between local and regional authorities and representatives of the aviation sector and airports in the context of spatial planning. This is an essential condition for obtaining the level of acceptance required to strengthen competition and put the European aviation sector in a leading position;
5. against this background, finds it very regrettable that the local and regional levels and their authorities are not mentioned at all when describing the need for joint effort and collaboration. The territorial and spatial perspectives are also missing, as well as awareness of the local and regional environmental impact, which is a prerequisite for long-term aviation development. Representatives of the aviation sector are aware of this, but this is not expressed in the strategy;

Development of the aviation market

6. takes the view that the liberalisation of the European aviation market over the last 20 years has been a benefit for the regions and the public, and supports the proposed measures for developing the aviation market, including negotiations on a comprehensive aviation agreement with a number of countries and regions at EU level, as well as negotiations on competition rules, these being measures that could contribute to the continued liberalisation of aviation and guarantee a level playing field for fair competition in the aviation sector. The comprehensive aviation agreements that are negotiated must include respect for fundamental ILO conventions;
7. while noting the impact of liberalisation on the EU aviation landscape, also points to the main new challenges it faces, namely the need to: promote balanced territorial development, ensure that existing and newly created jobs comply with European standards, and apply State aid rules;

Capacity in the air and in the market inadequate?

8. with regard to capacity in the air, finds that the picture painted by dialogue with players in the market is that there is not actually any lack of airspace capacity and that average delays are very modest. On the other hand, there is considerable potential to increase efficiency and environmental performance and to limit costs by implementing the Single European Sky and the results from SESAR, among other things through common standards that can contribute to opening up the market for air-traffic management services. Efficient, well integrated air-traffic management is beneficial to the regions and of regional interest, not least for peripheral regions with small airports. Remote air-traffic management provides an example of how new technology can enable more efficient operation of small regional airports;
9. supports the proposal to develop strategic planning for the management of airport capacity at EU level in a situation where there are shortages at a number of large airports, while at the same time a large number of airports are underused; Because there is over-capacity on the whole, it makes sense to ensure effective use of infrastructure that is already in place, with an obvious impact on the environment. Such planning at the national and regional levels must be based on the territorial dimension. One key question is how existing airport capacity could be used in the best way. The strategy highlights the differences in connectivity that exist between various regions, which are not always explained by differences in the underlying circumstances and demand or conditions on the supply side. These differences result in considerable competitive disadvantages for certain regions, as well as poorer, more uneven exploitation of the overall potential, and they also act against territorial cohesion. The starting-point should be to provide reasonable regional connectivity for all European regions, while avoiding duplication of unprofitable airports, as well as distortion of competition in cases where the basis for a functioning market exists;

10. welcomes the fact that the Commission will continue to work with the airport observatory to monitor trends in both intra-EU and extra-EU connectivity in Europe and to identify any shortcomings and the appropriate measures to be taken. A coordinated, ongoing analysis of the regions' connectivity in relation to estimated demand, showing which regions are under-served together with information about existing airport capacity, should be a valuable basis for planning the exploitation and development of airport capacity. The attractiveness of underused airports could be influenced through planning measures that improve accessibility and extend the catchment area. The Committee of the Regions considers it essential for such planning to consider both passenger and cargo transport from an inter-modal perspective, and to pay attention to economic, social and environmental consequences;
11. notes that, in the strategy, the Commission invites the Council and the European Parliament to adopt quickly the proposal to revise the Slot Regulation that the Commission submitted in 2011. The Committee of the Regions considers that regional connectivity should be given a clearer priority than was the case when the revision proposal was published, and also considers that the proposal to revise the Slot Regulation should be re-written so that it addresses the prioritisation of regional connectivity more effectively;

Air cargo

12. points out that cargo is a significant part of the aviation sector, but the aviation strategy does not draw any attention to it whatsoever. Air cargo is an important part of goods transport and logistics that affects regions' development opportunities, above all in outermost regions, and it is a significant matter in terms of regional planning. It is important for air cargo to be given due consideration in planning with an inter-modal logistics perspective. The Committee of the Regions is of the view that a cohesive aviation strategy for the EU must pay attention to air cargo with regard to airport capacity, inter-modality and logistics networks, and also the particular noise problems that can arise from traffic late in the evening, during the night and early in the morning;

Connectivity

13. notes that the conditions for a region's development largely depend on the quality of its international connectivity. From the regional perspective, good connectivity is the primary benefit that the aviation sector is expected to deliver. The Committee of the Regions is therefore of the view that being able to work towards strengthening and developing the regions' connectivity through route development is a legitimate interest for the regions. In the case of airports in outermost regions, air connectivity is a necessity in view of their geographical location and the absence of other alternative forms of transport. This could involve incentives for establishing new direct destinations and destination marketing. Transparency is required in order to ensure that competition is not distorted and credibility is not lost;

14. at the same time, highlights the fact that it is the integrated, inter-modal transport system that gives the regions their connectivity. Aviation is of decisive importance for long-distance connections and for continental and inter-continental connectivity, but door-to-door journeys and the social benefits are determined by how well aviation interacts with other modes of transport in a cohesive transport system. In this context, attention should also be paid to the need for those who work at, or in connection with, airports to have public transport that is adapted to their commuting, which largely takes place outside normal working hours;

Airport charges as a control instrument

15. underlines the importance of transparency and dialogue between airports and airlines when determining airport charges. The Committee of the Regions would also like the EU aviation strategy to include a call for coordinated use of the option of linking airport charges to the environment with regard to noise and air quality. The broad, coordinated application of environment-linked airport charges should have a considerable steering effect and it could be one of a number of incentives that, coupled with economic instruments to reduce fuel consumption and the impact on the climate, could contribute to faster renewal of the aircraft fleet, which is important for climate and environmental reasons. The Committee of the Regions would also like the question of incentives for faster renewal of the aircraft fleet with a view to reducing the impact of aviation on the climate and environment to be given general consideration in the strategy;

Support for under-served regions

16. regrets the fact that the Commission has not highlighted the role of regional airports and their importance for aviation development in the strategy. The balanced approach which the Commission intends to adopt under the Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines (OJ C 99, 4.4.2014, p. 3) should take account of the need for regional development and connectivity for all Europe's regions, especially sparsely populated, peripheral and outermost regions, where there is an obvious risk of regional needs not being met by the market. The Committee of the Regions underlines the fact that the public service obligation is a very important matter from the regional perspective. It must also be considered that regional airports need to be able to receive support in sustainably maintaining their financial break-even point over the long term. Air connections to national economic and administrative centres and to hub airports for onward transport to the wider world are crucial for the long-term survival of outermost, peripheral and sparsely populated regions, as well as regions currently affected by poor connectivity for other reasons. In many cases, the creation of reasonable development conditions for these regions requires investment and operational contributions to airports in addition to publicly procured transport, as well as the safeguarding of take-off and landing slots at peak times at the hub airports that enable onward transfers to other destinations in Europe and other continents. This is crucial for territorial cohesion in the EU, and the Committee of the Regions is of the view that this must be made clear in the aviation strategy. The Committee of the Regions reaffirms the view it has previously expressed that the Commission should focus on large airports and that state aid measures for small airports with average traffic not exceeding 300 000 passengers per annum should not fall within the scope of State aid given that these airports can have no notable impact on trade between Member States, that they are unable for structural reasons to cover their capital and operating costs¹ and that public support is intended for the development of a safe and economically viable air traffic infrastructure in regions with poor transport connections². This should, of course, go hand in hand with a significant increase in the exemption threshold for aid to airports providing SGEIs (currently set at 200 000 passengers per annum), restoring the threshold of 1 million passengers per annum which was in place before the adoption of the Almunia package on SGEIs. The prerequisite for such action must nevertheless be that a reasonable level of connectivity cannot be achieved by any other means;

¹ CoR opinion on EU guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines, 28 November 2013, COTER-V-043.

² See European Commission decision on Angoulême airport, 23.7.2014: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-498_en.htm.

17. considers that the application of State-aid rules, in particular the 2014 Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines, in combination with the EU's rules governing services of general economic interest are perceived as complicated and that this results in uncertainty with regard to how local and regional authorities can provide economic support to regional airports. The Commission's handling of such matters is considered to take a very long time and consequently the authorisation procedure should be clarified and streamlined. If handling is uncertain and behind schedule, this risks making it harder to provide important support for maintaining reasonable connectivity for small, peripheral and outermost regions and may have a negative impact on economic development in those regions;
18. in relation to the revision of the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)³ which aims at exempting state aid for airport infrastructure from the notification requirement, the CoR explicitly supports the European Commission's approach to investment aid for regional airports, whereby: "It is not appropriate to establish a notification threshold in terms of the amount of aid since the competitive impact of an aid measure depends mainly on the size of the airport and not on the size of the investment." The CoR also trusts that the European Commission will ensure alignment with existing EU law in relation to the "Definitions for aid for regional airports";

Research and innovation

19. welcomes the fact that the strategy highlights the importance of research, development and innovation for maintaining Europe's leadership in the aviation sector and the aeronautical industry. The Committee of the Regions highlights the role of the regions, not least within the framework of their responsibility for regional development work in collaboration with the public sector, the private sector and the academic world for research, development and innovation. Research and development that contribute to limiting the environmental impact of aviation are of particular interest for local and regional authorities. The development of fossil-free, cost-effective aviation fuels is one example of an important area of research;

³ http://ec.europa.eu/competition/consultations/2016_gber_review/index_en.html.

Drones

20. sees great potential for the use of drones at local and regional level, not least in more sparsely populated parts of Europe, and it supports the ambition of putting Europe in a leading position in the development of drone technology and use. Drones have considerable development potential in the area of agriculture, for example, where they can contribute to increased efficiency in the long term. The scope and number of various drone-based services are expected to experience strong growth, to the benefit of business and citizens alike, but at the same time the increased use of drones means that attention and consideration must be given to questions relating to safety in airspace and on the ground, protection of privacy, liability, regulation of the use of the radio spectrum, and acceptance by the general public. Against this background, the Committee of the Regions has carried out a Territorial Impact Assessment on drones. The Committee of the Regions would like to see basic risk-based, harmonised regulation of all drone use at EU level, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, and it underlines the need for dialogue between EASA, which has the task of developing such fundamental regulation, and relevant players at national, regional and local level within the Member States. Drone technology will give aviation a different kind of local and regional proliferation than previously, and the spatial dimension must be considered in the context of legislation and regulation. The general harmonised regulation on drones should also include rules on certification and type-approval covering training and qualifications for handling and maintaining drones, thereby ensuring freedom of movement for these professionals and freedom to establish companies in any part of the European Union;

Climate, the environment, and inter-modality social planning for sustainable development

21. finds it strange that the issue of climate, which is one of the very greatest common challenges for the future, has been given such summary treatment in the strategy. In this respect, points out that the fragmentation of the European sky and the lack of global mitigation action as major factors in holding back the reduction of carbon-dioxide emissions have to be addressed. Working through ICAO to achieve a global mechanism for limiting the impact of the aviation sector on the climate is good and it is important, but it must not prevent us in Europe from having a higher level of ambition than the floor set by ICAO, in line with the goal of high environmental standards being maintained and strengthened over time, as set out in the strategy. Special consideration should be given to mitigating any accessibility and competitiveness problems arising for regions of article 349 TFEU;
22. regrets that the aviation industry (together with shipping) were left out of last year's Paris climate agreement. While recalling that flights within the EU are already subject to the Union's Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), strongly encourages the application of such a mechanism beyond the EU to cap carbon dioxide emissions. For this reason the CoR strongly encourages the ICAO to move a step forward on this issue during the upcoming 39th Assembly;

23. highlights the fact that, with regard to the impact on the climate, all players have a common responsibility, and it is important to have a holistic perspective and not merely to focus on the impact of air transport on the climate. Ground transport and airport activities account for a considerable proportion of total carbon-dioxide emissions at the local and regional levels, at up to 50%. Collaboration between local and regional authorities, the private sector and airports on developing climate-smart inter-modal transport solutions is an example of an initiative that could make a palpable contribution to reducing the impact on the climate. Many airports are working ambitiously on programmes contributing to a marked reduction in carbon-dioxide emissions from airports in Europe. The Committee of the Regions is of the view that the aviation strategy should give due consideration to local and regional authorities' responsibilities and potential for making an active contribution to limiting aviation-related carbon-dioxide emissions;
24. considers aviation noise to be the great challenge that must be tackled in order for European aviation to continue developing. The Committee of the Regions considers it noteworthy that this issue of decisive importance for aviation has been treated so inadequately. Aviation noise causes significant health problems and is detrimental to people's well-being. Due to their responsibility for citizens' health, safety and well-being, as well as spatial planning, local and regional authorities have a key role to play in managing the aviation noise around an airport and the conflicts of interest that result from it;
25. would also like to see a more comprehensive treatment of the other effects of aviation on the environment, predominantly emissions of nitrogen oxides and particles into the air. The strategy refers to the expected results from research and development projects such as Clean Sky and SESAR, and points out that an annual environmental report will allow the EU, Member States and industry to better track the environmental performance of the air-transport sector and monitor the effectiveness of different measures. The Committee of the Regions welcomes such a systematic, consistent and regular assessment of environmental performance. It is of great value to local and regional authorities for data on lower geographic levels to be made available;
26. is of the view that the Aviation Strategy should explicitly emphasise the pivotal role of the local and regional authorities and encourages the development of proper forms of cooperation between airport administrations and local and regional authorities. Examples of good practice should be identified to stimulate and support this kind of development;

27. takes the view that there are two fundamental approaches to environmental impact that must complement each other. The first of these is to limit emissions at source, and international standards and instruments are of great importance for this. The second is to limit local emissions and/or their impact through effective spatial planning and other measures at the local and regional levels in collaboration between local and regional authorities and representatives of the airports and the aviation sector. Nonetheless, the significance of planning at the local and regional levels and the key role of the local and regional authorities in this are not mentioned at all in the strategy, which is a major failing.

Brussels, 12 October 2016

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Markku Markkula

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Communication on "An Aviation Strategy for Europe"; Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication on "An Aviation Strategy for Europe"; Proposal for a Regulation on common rules in the field of civil aviation and establishing a European Union Aviation Safety Agency and repealing Regulation (EC) No 216/2008.
Reference(s)	COM (2015) 598 final; SWD (2015) 261 final COM (2015) 613 final
Legal basis	Article 307 TFEU
Procedural basis	Rule 41(a) of the CoR Rules of Procedure
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	Commission letter of 7 December 2015
Date of Bureau/President's decision	9 December 2016
Commission responsible	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER)
Rapporteur	Ulrika Carlefall Landergren (SE/ALDE) Member of Kungsbacka Municipal Council
Analysis	25 January 2016
Discussed in commission	2 March 2016
Date adopted by commission	4 July 2016
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	Majority
Date adopted in plenary	12 October 2016
Previous Committee opinions	Opinion on Implementation of the 2011 white paper on transport (CoR 1426/2015 fin ⁴) Opinion on mobility in geographically and demographically challenged regions (CoR 1691/2014 fin ⁵) Opinion on EU guidelines to state aid to airports and airlines (CoR 5250/2013 fin ⁶) Opinion on Airport package (CoR 649/2012 fin ⁷) Opinion on the Single European Sky II (CoR 333/2008 fin ⁸) Opinion on the Future of European airports (CoR 406/2006 fin ⁹)
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	N/A

4 [OJ C 195, 12.6.2015, p. 10](#)

5 [OJ C 415, 20.11.2014, p. 18](#)

6 [OJ C 114, 15.4.2014, p. 11](#)

7 [OJ C 277, 13.9.2012, p. 110](#)

8 [OJ C 120, 28/05/2009, p. 52](#)

9 [OJ C 305, 15/12/2007, p. 11](#)