

Brussels, 16<sup>th</sup> march 2007

## Commission urges Member States to speed up the construction of a single European sky

***The single European sky aims to adjust air traffic management to the needs of a highly competitive civil aviation industry and of all other airspace users. It intends to enhance current safety objectives, optimize capacity and increase overall efficiency. Therefore, air traffic management needs to become more organised at European level. The key to a rational organisation of airspace is integration of management across borders through functional airspace blocks. These should be based on operational requirements – in particular traffic flows – rather than existing national borders. In a Communication, the European Commission expresses its concerns about the progress made to date and fears that the results over the next two years will not be sufficiently robust and beneficial.***

“Airspace users expect a high quality and a cost-efficient service from air navigation services. The current fragmentation of the air traffic management industry in a patchwork serving a global industry is an obstacle to efficient service provision. Member States must overcome fragmentation and create regional providers to take advantage of economies of scale. It is the duty of the Commission to recall Member States to their obligations,” *stated Jacques Barrot, Commission Vice-President in charge of transport.*

The requirement to build functional airspace blocks is a cornerstone of the single European sky legislation. Already at the moment of conciliation in December 2003, the European Parliament expressed its concerns about the efficiency of the procedure leading to their establishment. The current rules leave all initiative to the Member States and are therefore dubbed the "bottom-up approach". The Commission is inclined to review this procedure on the basis of experiences reported on its implementation.

Although discussions on creating functional airspace blocks have lifted off in nearly all Member States, few projects are promising enough to meet the Community requirements by end 2008. The challenge is to turn the European service providers, which are in fact global dwarfs in terms of airspace, into bigger players. This transformation would also offer the opportunity to operate the air traffic centres at a more functional size and to get rid of the multiplicity of technical systems with their high maintenance costs<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The annual bill of the current fragmentation in the system is calculated to stand at around one billion euros in a 7 billion market.

The challenge is to initiate the process of defragmentation in a smart way at the lowest possible cost for airspace users and relying on appropriate social dialogue structures to ensure a smooth transition. That is the obligation imposed upon Member States also as owners of the service providers.<sup>2</sup>

Further Information on the single European sky is available on:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/air/single\\_sky/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/air/single_sky/index_en.htm)

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<sup>2</sup> Apart from the UK, where the National Air Traffic Services provider (NATS) has operated as a Private Public Partnership (PPP) since 2001.