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### INFORMATION NOTE

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Council  
Subject: Preparation for the summer air travel season  
*- Information from the Commission*

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Delegations will find, in annex, a background note prepared by the Commission on the above-mentioned subject for consideration under "Any other business" at the meeting of the Council (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy) on 1 June 2023.

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**Background note**

**AOB - Preparation for the summer travel season**

TTE Council – 1 June 2023

*Information from the Commission*

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the summer 2022 air travel season in Europe saw a heavily saturated network, leading to sometimes long delays, high costs for operators, heavy workloads for transport workers, and negative impacts on European citizens and travellers.

Summer 2023 will see even higher traffic levels as demand recovers, greater volatility, as well as reduced airspace due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, resulting airspace restrictions, and large-scale military exercises, as well as a high risk of disruption resulting from industrial action and staff shortages.

Air traffic levels in summer 2023 are forecast to be up to **15% higher** than 2022 this summer in many parts of Europe, which will need to be accommodated in **only 80% of the full European airspace**, putting additional pressure primarily on air navigation service providers to deliver efficient services, but also on already constrained airports and airlines. There is a high risk of a return of the difficulties witnessed in 2022.

Addressing this challenging situation requires joint efforts from all involved and will require **predictable and realistic planning, flexibility, and transparency**. The aviation sector has committed to close coordination among themselves based on these principles, and governments should support this. Moreover, the role of the Eurocontrol Network Manager and especially the Network Operations Plan (NOP) is key to coordinating the aviation ecosystem in general and especially over the summer. All stakeholders, including Member States, should work closely with the Eurocontrol Network Manager to anticipate potential issues and respond quickly and effectively to any disruptions.

**Staff shortages** in airports, ground handling companies, and airlines are primarily a responsibility of the industry to solve, and actors are introducing hiring measures and running recruitment drives. Member States can contribute to addressing shortages through prioritising and reducing the waiting time for background checks for critical airport staff, ensuring that contingency plans are in place, facilitating training and cross-border mobility, and promoting dialogue between all stakeholders to address disputes before they escalate. Ensuring sufficient border control capacity is equally critical.

In addition, **industrial action** by aviation sector workers risks exacerbating the disruption and inconvenience for passengers and increasing the capacity constraints on an already saturated network. This spring already saw industrial action in several EU Member States causing considerable disturbance on the overall European air traffic management network.

While the right to strike is important and a fundamental right, the impact of national strikes on European connectivity has recently increased, and our citizens and airlines are getting frustrated. One illustration of this is the petition launched by Ryanair, which has gathered one million signatures. It is important that measures are taken to the greatest extent to mitigate the impact of strikes on the overall network, including via early notification and the protection of overflights. The Commission in 2017 encouraged Member States to take measures to preserve overflights, and notably to ensure 100% continuity of service for flights crossing the airspace of strike-affected Member States, having no part in the strikes, as already done by some Member States.<sup>1</sup> This remains valid and would not only reduce considerably the impact on the entire European Air Traffic Management network, but also on the environment.

The European Commission is following aviation preparedness for summer 2023 closely and has been working with stakeholders to raise awareness and to foster exchange of best practices to avoid disruptions.

The role of Member States is vital in making this collective effort a success. As well as addressing staff shortages and industrial action, Member States should coordinate and cooperate closely with Eurocontrol and aviation service providers to encourage maximum delivery of capacity provided by their air navigation service providers, and at airports and airlines in their jurisdictions, and ensure that citizens are able to travel smoothly this summer.

The proposal made by the Commission to reform and promote a more integrated Single European Sky, including improved network management (SES2+), should also help reduce flight cancellations in the event of strikes. The proposal of the Commission also seeks to make service provision more efficient, flexible and scalable, which will be important beyond this summer.

The reform is urgently needed to address structural issues leading to congestion and extra-CO2 emissions in Europe. The co-legislators should work constructively towards solutions that are more effective than the current framework and should conclude the negotiations this year.

With the same aim to ease international travel at this critical juncture, the Commission is expected to come forward a proposal for a Council Recommendation inviting Member States to take specific measures in view of the expiration of the EU Digital COVID Certificate at the end of June. In particular, Member States should connect to the WHO global digital health certification network as soon as it becomes available and, where relevant, should continue to issue certificates identical to the EU Digital COVID Certificates even after 30 June 2023 for the purpose of facilitating international travel to third countries that still require them.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication - Aviation: Open and Connected Europe, COM(2017) 286 final, s. 3.2.