

European Coordination Group on Economic matters

WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN COORDINATION GROUP ON ECONOMIC MATTERS? WHAT ARE ITS OBJECTIVES?

The objective of the European Coordination Group on Economic matters (ECG-ECO) is to harmonise positions amongst ECAC experts and find common ground on aviation economic issues to present a unified, strong position within ICAO. It functions as a think tank, facilitating the exchange of expertise and information. I firmly believe that engaging in discussions with experts from all ECAC Member States, each with its distinct policies, approaches and systems, is the optimal preparation for ICAO meetings. Based on my experience, the discussions encompassing diverse viewpoints within Europe also take place in a similar manner at ICAO level.

WHAT TOPICS IS THE GROUP CURRENTLY FOCUSING ON?

We are currently in the preparation phase for the upcoming ICAO Air Transport Regulation Panel (ATRP), scheduled for April 2024 in Montreal. The ATRP agenda will include discussions on liberalisation in terms of ownership and control and full-cargo operations. During the previous ATRP meeting, four ICAO working groups were established to assist in fulfilling the tasks outlined by the ICAO Assembly in 2022. These groups will conduct thorough examinations on various topics, including an investment agreement, potential cargo liberalisation, and guidelines for unmanned aircraft operations, and will develop guidelines to temporarily respond to international crises whilst safeguarding the integrity of air services agreements. This latter topic was discussed during the Working Group 4 meeting held in Dakar at the beginning of November.

The work accomplished in these smaller groups is very productive. Experts can freely speak and exchange positions, define problems more accurately, and endeavour to find constructive solutions. These groups therefore provide a useful mechanism to explore in a timely manner how new areas, such as health issues impacting aviation, could be handled within air services agreements.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU SEE ARISING IN THE FUTURE? WHAT MAIN CHALLENGES FOR ECAC MEMBER STATES DO YOU SEE EMERGING/BEING DISCUSSED BY THE GROUP AT FUTURE MEETINGS?

At present, the elephant in the room is the climate crisis. Questions around the rollout of sustainable aviation fuels are keeping governments and industry busy. On the other hand, liberalisation has been under discussion for decades and we have already reached a satisfactory level of liberalisation in most regions. From my perspective, therefore, the emphasis is not as strong on liberalisation compared to climate-related matters. I think we should be focusing more on key climate change issues in the aviation sector. These could, for instance, include issues arising from the rollout of the decarbonisation of the aviation sector that have an economic impact on airlines and airports.

Furthermore, challenges emerge from an already liberalised environment, such as social questions stemming from new business models. At the same time, the aviation sector is still struggling with the lingering effects of the pandemic, like staff shortages. Not to forget the challenges facing airlines and airports in integrating new technical developments related to digitalisation and artificial intelligence. New measures in facilitation or in the context of decarbonisation can have a significant economic impact on airlines. Therefore, as regulators, it is important to look at all these areas from a broader perspective.

Within the European coordination group and the Air Transport Regulation Panel, we need to foster collaboration with colleagues from various panels and working groups, for example in the facilitation or environment areas. This approach can encourage us to think out of the box, paving the way for creative solutions.

FINAL REMARKS

Aviation has always been a very dynamic sector, even compared to other modes of transport. When crises occur, aviation often faces more profound impacts than other modes of transport due to the global scope of its operations. As European experts, we already have substantial experience in swiftly coping with unforeseen events. This experience will contribute to addressing current challenges at national, European and international level. I am confident that we will find appropriate solutions at the opportune time. ●

interview with



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Christine Mucina-Bauer has served as Austria's chief negotiator for air services agreements since 2013. She was aviation attachée at the Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU in Brussels from September 2022 to March 2023. In 2005, she joined the Ministry for Transport to work on the Austrian Presidency of the European Union, which it held in the first half of 2006. Since then, Christine has been working in the Strategy and International department. Prior to joining the ministry, she worked in the Austrian Representation of the European Parliament in Vienna during the accession of ten new Member States to the EU in 2004. Christine studied law in Germany and Switzerland and holds a university and State degree in law and a postgraduate diploma in European and international law.