

Keynote Address of the Czech Presidency

PUBLIC HEARING
on the
“Trans-Atlantic relations between the EU and North American countries
in the air transport sector”

Brussels, Monday 4th of May 2009

Venue: European Economic and Social Committee
Jacques Delors Building – Meeting Room 63
Rue Belliard 99 – 1040 Brussels

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Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, dear colleagues,
I would like to express a word of thanks to the European Economic and Social Committee for the invitation to this public hearing relating to the preparation of an exploratory opinion on “Trans-Atlantic relations between the European Union and North American countries in the air transport sector”. It is an honour to me, on behalf of the Czech Presidency, to open the panel debate on this important topic today.

Czech Presidency requested the European Economic and Social Committee for drawing up an opinion on “Trans-Atlantic relations in aviation sector” in December 2008. We felt the need of the widest possible cooperation and support during the ongoing crucial negotiations between the European Union and the United States of America in the air transport sector. It would be useless to repeat again the facts and statistical information proving that the relation between the EU and North America is by far the most important. This fact has been confirmed by the signature of a historical comprehensive Air Transport Agreement between the EU and the US in April 2007.

For the first time closer cooperation between the EU and the US has been established to tackle new challenges in civil aviation, such as safety, security or the environment. But we all here are aware that the, so called, first stage agreement was only the first step in deepening cooperation between the EU and the US. That’s why we committed ourselves in the agreement to continue in negotiations with a view to create a single air transport market between the EU and the US with no restrictions on air services and with free flows of investment. To this end, the second stage negotiations started in May 2008 in Slovenian Brdo and continued in Washington D.C. in September. For the time being it was careful testing of attitudes of both sides. But now we have to fasten our seat-belts and speed up to reach a second stage agreement within a defined timescale.

One of the keynotes of the Czech Presidency is slogan “Europe without barriers”, because the Czech Republic, with respect to its history, feels the need to remove barriers and overcome obstacles in all the areas of human activities. And not only within Europe, but also within the entire world. Therefore the Czech Presidency firmly supports creation of the Open Aviation Area over the Atlantic. It is possible. We can see an example of the new comprehensive aviation agreement between the EU and Canada. Be able to take full advantage of this success it is necessary to create single aviation market also between the EU and the US. Especially when the single aviation market over the Atlantic, based on comprehensive agreements between the EU and the US and between the EU and Canada, can be a model example how to overcome the traditional system based on restricted bilateral agreements.

I cannot forget to mention current financial and economic crisis that makes our collective work much harder. Global economic crisis shatters basic elements of free market, which is a fundamental source of our prosperity and power. The crisis and its concrete social impacts are scary. Air transportation is one of the worst affected areas. But a far more serious danger would be the victory of protectionism, isolationism and ever spreading regulation. Therefore we cannot desist from our effort to achieve our purpose, which is creation of single aviation market based on non-discrimination, free market access, regulatory convergence, full investment opportunities and balanced approach to climate protection and economic freedom.

I believe that during the forthcoming rounds of negotiations between the EU and the US we will achieve that coveted objective and the full Open Aviation Area over the Atlantic will be created.

In conclusion I would like to thank once again to the European Economic and Social Committee and appreciate the work of its section for Transport, Energy,

Infrastructure and the Information Society, which contributes to the compact picture of the given issue.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention.