



**Aviation Day Conference  
(Lisbon CCB/Digital – 3 May 2021)**

**PANEL I - THE RECOVERY OF THE AVIATION SECTOR  
DURING AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**Ms Ingrid Cherfils, President of ECAC**

**The importance of strong international cooperation for the success of recovery  
measures in the short and long run**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning dear colleagues,

[Intro]

I would first like to thank our host Portugal – in particular the Minister for Infrastructure and Housing, Mr Pedro Nuno Santos and my friend and colleague Mr Luís Miguel Ribeiro, Chairman of the Board of the Portuguese Civil Aviation Authority – for hosting this event under their EU Presidency and for inviting me to speak today on this key topic of recovery for our sector.

As much as we miss our regular “get together”, we can all agree on the need for unity and solidarity which the present situation requires. European aviation is the most impacted by the consequences of the crisis, in comparison to other regions. The current challenges are extraordinary, and I welcome the opportunity to address them here. This exchange and discussion which we have maintained for over a year now are needed today more than ever.

One of the main roles of ECAC is to provide a platform to support and strengthen inter-governmental cooperation in air transport matters in Europe. We need to join our efforts and use our collective expertise to respond to the increasingly complex needs of the air transport industry in Europe. And the most recent crisis has put this role to the test.

[Background ECAs]

First, we have done what Member State organisations need to do, which is to keep our members in close touch. Since the start of the crisis in March of last year, we have been ensuring frequent coordination videoconferences at the level of Directors General of our 44

ECAC Member States, the European Commission and EASA as well as EUROCONTROL. We also received valuable input from other participants occasionally, such as ACI EUROPE, IATA, A4E, OECD and ECDC.

In a crisis situation, access to all relevant available information is critical. This coordination has enabled us to communicate, exchange information, and to harmonise measures to a certain extent. We were also able to learn first-hand about the various initiatives at States and at EU/EASA/EUROCONTROL level to support the policy and decision-making in the region, to facilitate transport and to intensify our engagement with the aviation sector.

The most important conclusion that had emerged from this process is that a harmonised approach is crucial for the effective restart and recovery of travel. We have moved on from facilitating essential transport in the early stages of the crisis, to the point where we need to be forward looking and plan for the restart of operations in Europe for the summer holidays but also to plan for how to emerge from the crisis with a better, more resilient, more sustainable aviation sector and to put in place strong measures ensuring a common level playing field in Europe after the crisis. Our ability to manage future crisis is also being prepared now, based on lessons learnt during the last 14 months.

#### [ECAC initiatives]

But to do that, we first have to ensure that aviation is able to restart at all. It has become very clear to all of us, who have responsibilities in the aviation sector, that we are not, and have not been, in the driving seat during this crisis. Public health was – and rightfully so – the factor driving decisions that had substantial and difficult impacts on travel generally and aviation in particular. While we can all agree that the protection of lives and fighting the pandemic is the main priority, our responsibility as decision makers in the aviation world is to ensure we have a safe, secure and sustainable mode of transport at all times and to ensure the survival of our sector as such, as aviation is crucial for the economic and social development in our region and globally.

Unfortunately we also have to admit, that while there were some lessons learnt, we have seen some of the issues from the first wave in 2020 recurring in the second or third waves in recent months. Some of these issues, such as the impact on travel of mandatory quarantine and the denial of traffic rights, continue to be imposed even more strongly with a greater willingness of States to apply travel restrictions.

ECAC developed some key elements documents, especially on economic, security and facilitation matters providing Member States some useful direction early in the crisis. We also regularly monitored the implementation of travel restrictions and requirements. and also encouraged measures to facilitate travel, such as public health corridors and other initiatives.

From the early stage of the crisis we developed some key indicators on economic effects. We now need to turn this into a conversation about the measures necessary to help restart the system and support actions by States – and to embrace a common approach towards the adoption of economic relief measures that avoid harmful asymmetries and any distortion of competition. This, we hope, will help us towards the re-establishment of a vibrant, competitive market in air travel which is safe, delivers business opportunities on the basis of fair and equal opportunity. And, most importantly which provides strategic connectivity and economic added value for our Member States as well as safety, quality and affordability for passengers.

We are also putting to use the feedback we have collected from Member States on the economic and financial relief measures introduced in their States. While these measures are yet to show their full effects we can see that there were some common approaches while also noting some significant differences in the amount and types of support provided, which has also varied over time. One observation across the region is that schemes to support employment and retain staff have been implemented across all sectors – not only aviation. This information will help us to describe, ahead of the next crisis – because there surely will be one – the measures that have proved most effective and just as importantly those we should seek to avoid if we are truly to learn the lessons of the past year.

[\[Common message / exit strategy\]](#)

This information-gathering and analysis will prove valuable in the longer term, but the issue we face now is the immediate state of the industry and the need for the earlier possible sustainable recovery consistent with the overriding need for safe and healthy travel. We must have a common approach to work towards an orderly return to safe travel, and the coming summer period provides a unique opportunity for the travel and tourism sectors if we can seize the initiative now.

This will not be easy. As aviation authorities, we need to work closely with our health

authorities to find the right mix of measures that protects the public in a way proportionate to the risk, while enabling air traffic to resume. As well as working within our own States we need to work with each other for a consistency of approach, since measures carried out in one State impact on all others and the demand for travel.

We need to ensure that measures that are necessary for health take into account their impacts on travel. For instance, there are clear differences of impact between testing requirements that may enable safe travel on one hand, and mandatory quarantine or removal of traffic rights that create major impediments to travel, on the other hand. We need to think ahead about the opportunities created by the mitigation of risk from the roll-out of vaccination programmes – certainly not by making vaccination a condition of travel but considering how it could enable progressive alleviation of restrictions.

And of course we need to do this not just within Europe but in cooperation with other regions, to apply these principles to a global recovery for aviation.

[Closing]

That is the task we face now. It is said that is always darkest before the dawn, and it seems to have been dark for some time. But we must take the opportunity of the dawn that vaccination brings us, not just passively waiting for a solution but actively turning it to our advantage to create the best possible recovery for a strong and sustainable aviation sector. ECAC is strongly committed to promote, support and facilitate these actions.

We will only achieve that through strong pan-European cooperation and coordination, and a common message. In this regard I would particularly like to thank EUROCONTROL, the European Commission and EASA for the excellent cooperation we have had for the past year in defining what needed to be done and trying to find solutions. Each crisis situation creates a sense of urgency, a focus on fewer priorities but also pushes for experimentation and new approaches. In the long term this crisis will be no different – It will contribute to build and sustain a more innovative culture for our aviation sector.

I hope this event will enable us to make great progress to that end, and I thank our hosts once again for this opportunity.