Article 14 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago, 1944) states that "Each Contracting State agrees to take effective measures to prevent the spread by means of air navigation of cholera, plague, smallpox, yellow fever, typhus (epidemic), smallpox, yellow fever, plague, and such other communicable diseases as the Contracting States shall from time to time decide to designate, and to that end Contracting States will keep in close consultation with the agencies concerned with international regulations relating to sanitary measures applicable to aircraft.

The ICAO Assembly Resolution A37-13 Prevention of spread of communicable disease through air travel urges Contracting State and regional safety oversight organizations to ensure that the public health sector and the aviation sector collaborate to develop a national preparedness plan which addresses public health emergencies of international concern and which is integrated with the general preparedness plan. It also urges Contracting States to join and participate in the Cooperative Arrangement for the Prevention of Spread of Communicable Disease through Air Travel (CAPSCA) project, where available, to ensure that its goals are achieved, unless equivalent measures are already in place.

The CAPSCA project stems from concern about SARS and then avian flu, with the focus on preventing, or at least managing, the spread of communicable disease by air travel. CAPSCA has been operating for a few years in all ICAO Regions. The First CAPSCA EUR (CAPSCA EUR/1) took place in the ICAO European and North Atlantic Office in September 2011 significantly expanding CAPSCA’s activities to becoming more global than regional.

Thanks to the kind invitation of Germany and Fraport, the owner and operator of the Frankfurt-am-Maine Airport, the Second meeting of CAPSCA (CAPSCA EUR/2) was held in the premises of the Fraport Conference Center.

The Meeting was attended by 71 participants from 29 States, 6 international organizations from public health and aviation sectors.

The aim of the CAPSCA-EUR/2 meeting was to continue inter-sectoral interaction amongst the participants which is one of the principle goals of the overall CAPSCA project. Public health emergency planning in the aviation sector cannot be successfully implemented without communication and collaboration between stakeholders, especially between public health and aviation sectors, and public and private organizations.

The CAPSCA project has been funded primarily by a series of grants from the UN Central Fund for Influenza Action, a fund administered by the UNDP. This comes to an end this year and CAPSCA currently have no further funding arranged. ICAO is looking for additional sources in supporting CAPSCA.

For many of us, public health emergency planning in the aviation sector may not have been seen as a high priority, or perhaps it is one that you don’t know much about. For most people, when people public health emergencies are discussed, aviation is not uppermost in their minds. However, air transport is likely to be the mechanism whereby a new disease is spread through the world – rapidly – and as air transport is the lifeblood of many businesses, the economic effect of a public health emergency can be devastating. According to the White Paper "Pandemic" for Airports prepared and published by Fraport, within the framework of globalization, it should be assumed that outbreaks of infections on other continents represent a substantial threat to the population in Europe within 14 – 24 hours.

CAPSCA’s aim is to demonstrate that public health emergency planning in aviation is worthy of everyone’s attention and that it can, and should, fit into day to day contingency planning. The only effective way to do this is by efficient inter-sectoral and inter-agency communication and collaboration.