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SEVENTH WORLDWIDE AIR TRANSPORT CONFERENCE (ATCONF/7)

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Agenda Item 1: Overview of developments in the field of air transport
1.1: Developments and progress since the Sixth Worldwide Air Transport Conference (ATConf/6)

PRACTICES IN THE RECOVERY OF CHINA'S INTERNATIONAL PASSENGER FLIGHTS: A CASE STUDY OF THE CHINA – CENTRAL ASIA MARKET

(Presented by China)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Taking the China–Central Asia market as an example, this paper presents China's practices in facilitating the recovery of international flights through a combination of measures, including expanding traffic rights arrangements, enhancing border-clearance facilitation, and optimizing the allocation of traffic rights and slot resources. In the first half of 2026, the volume of flights between China and Central Asian countries increased by approximately three times compared with 2019, achieving full route network coverage across the five countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on global air transport. With the gradual recovery of international air transport, air connectivity, market access, and industry resilience have become topics of common concern to all States. Assembly Resolution A42-26, adopted by the 42nd Session of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly, reaffirms ICAO's continuing policies in the field of economic regulation of international air transport. The Assembly also identified the recovery of the international air transport market and air connectivity as key topics for discussion.

1.2 In the first half of 2026, Chinese airlines operated an average of 4,386 international passenger flights per week, surpassing the level recorded during the same period in 2019. In the post-pandemic period, China has facilitated the recovery of international flights and expanded the market by expanding bilateral traffic rights arrangements, optimizing traffic rights allocation policies, increasing the supply of slots, and enhancing ports of entry and visa facilitation. Among the regional markets, the China–Central Asia air transport market has shown particularly strong growth, and its experience provides useful insights into how market access policies can affect air connectivity.

[1] English and Chinese versions provided by China.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 China–Central Asia Flight Operations

2.1.1 In the first half of 2026, the China–Central Asia air transport market achieved rapid growth, with the overall volume of flights increasing by 303.7 per cent compared with 2019. Flight volumes between China and Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan reached 658.2 per cent, 262.7 per cent, 260.6 per cent, 209.1 per cent, and 138.0 per cent of their respective 2019 levels.

2.1.2 A total of 14 Chinese and foreign airlines operated international routes between China and the five Central Asian countries, an increase of four airlines compared with 2019. Of these, seven airlines operated routes between China and Kazakhstan, eight operated routes between China and Uzbekistan, four operated routes between China and Kyrgyzstan, four operated routes between China and Tajikistan, and two operated routes between China and Turkmenistan.

2.1.3 International routes operated by Chinese and foreign airlines connected China with 12 destinations in Central Asia, an increase of four destinations compared with 2019. These comprised five destinations in Kazakhstan, two in Uzbekistan, two in Kyrgyzstan, two in Tajikistan, and one in Turkmenistan.

2.1.4 Chinese and foreign airlines operated a total of 49 city-pair routes, forming a multi-point route network centred on capitals and major cities such as Almaty, Astana, Tashkent, Bishkek, Dushanbe, and Ashgabat. This represented an increase of 31 city-pair routes compared with 2019. The network had the widest coverage between China and Kazakhstan, with 20 city pairs, followed by 12 city pairs with Uzbekistan, eight with Kyrgyzstan, six with Tajikistan, and three with Turkmenistan.

2.2 Drivers of Growth in the China–Central Asia Market

2.2.1 The exceptional growth of the China–Central Asia market, in addition to the expansion of personnel exchanges and economic and trade ties, can be attributed to the following factors:

a) **Continued expansion of bilateral traffic rights arrangements.** In recent years, China and Central Asian countries have gradually expanded traffic rights arrangements through bilateral air services consultations, providing support for airlines to increase capacity and expand their networks. Meanwhile, China has developed comprehensive cooperation with Central Asian countries in policy coordination, infrastructure projects, and safe, green and smart civil aviation development, thereby establishing air silk road and improving regional connectivity.

b) **Optimization of policies for the allocation and management of traffic rights resources and slots.** The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) has developed and continued to optimize *CAAC's Rules on Allocation of International Passenger Traffic Rights* to improve resource utilization efficiency and guide Chinese airlines to adopt differentiated and rational network deployment strategies.

c) **Simplification of international air transport procedures.** Relying on national and airport-level mechanisms for the facilitation of air transport procedures, China has coordinated efforts to optimize facilitation measures, including unilateral visa exemptions, transit visa exemptions, electronic entry declarations, smart border-clearance, direct transit without inspection, and payment services upon entry, and has worked to address the border-clearance facilitation issues advised by airlines and airports.

2.3 **Priorities for the Next Stage**

2.3.1 China will continue to deepen aviation cooperation with Central Asian countries, further expand market access on the basis of existing traffic rights arrangements, expand the destination network, and increase flight frequencies; continue to improve the operating environment for airlines and enhance passenger facilitation; and promote the sustained and sound development of the China–Central Asia air transport market. At the same time, China stands ready to conduct bilateral air service negotiations with more countries, gradually lower market access barriers, and jointly unlock the potential of the air transport market.

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