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Answer given by Executive Vice-President Ribera
on behalf of the European Commission
(27.5.2026)

In its Decision of 2022 the Commission authorised Portugal to grant a EUR 453 million aid to bring SATA Air Açores ('SATA')¹, back to viability under its Guidelines for rescuing and restructuring undertakings in difficulty². The Decision finds that the aid avoids the risks of disruption of an important service and of exit of an undertaking with a systemic role in the Azores.

The Decision is subject to conditions to ensure a lasting financial recovery of SATA, particularly the implementation of a restructuring plan. To limit the distortions of competition brought by the aid, Portugal offered to divest at least 51% in Azores Airlines. Such divestment, committed by Portugal, does not require the sale of SATA's operations in the Azores but only of a majority shareholding of its international business. TAP Air Portugal's (TAP) privatisation is also a decision of the Portuguese authorities and was not imposed by the Commission decision approving restructuring aid to TAP³.

The economic, social and territorial cohesion of the country and Azores can be preserved by the competition measures foreseen in the relevant decisions, which allow competitors to offer air transport services in competition with SATA/TAP, whereas all routes not economically profitable can be tendered by Portugal as Public Service Obligations⁴. Furthermore, the Commission approved under Article 107(2)(a) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) social aid schemes adopted by Portugal to support air transport for residents of remote regions, including the Azores.

Under the TFEU, the Commission cannot impose any privatisation but can only assess the State aid measures notified by the Member States (Art. 107 TFEU).

¹ Commission Decision (EU) 2023/1229 of 7 June 2022 on the State aid SA.58101 (2020/C ex 2020/N) and SA.62043 (2021/C ex 2021/N) which Portugal is planning to implement for rescuing and restructuring the SATA Group, C/2022/3816, OJ L 160, 26.6.2023, pp. 39–91.

² Communication from the Commission — Guidelines on State aid for rescuing and restructuring non-financial undertakings in difficulty, OJ C 249, 31.7.2014, pp. 1–28.

³ Commission Decision (EU) 2022/763 of 21 December 2021 on the State aid SA.60165- 2021/C (ex 2021/N) which Portugal is planning to implement for TAP SGPS, C/2021/9941, OJ L 139, 18.5.2022, pp. 19–71.

⁴ Regulation (EC) No 1008/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 September 2008 on common rules for the operation of air services in the Community (Recast), OJ L 293, 31.10.2008, pp. 3–20.