Airport capacity and groundhandling: towards a more efficient policy

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The European Parliament adopted an own-initiative report drawn up by Anne E. **JENSEN** (ADLE, DK), in response to the Commission's communication on an action plan for airport capacity, efficiency and safety in Europe. Parliament pointed out that globalisation and rapid economic growth would result in the EU, in a growth in demand for air travel (traffic without airport constraints) averaging at least 4.3 % per annum, and most probably as much as 5.2 % per annum. Adequate airport capacity and efficient ground handling and use of capacity were vital to the European economy and must be ensured. The report welcomed the Commission's proposals and stressed the importance of air transport in ensuring territorial, economic and social cohesion in the Union. It considered that the 14 measures suggested by the Commission represented a consistent approach for improving the use of current capacities, but requested the Commission to set more concrete deadlines for their implementation and insisted on those deadlines being respected.

The main points of the report are as follows:

- building new capacities: Members proposed to introduce a survey of actual demand for infrastructure, which would improve any future comprehensive European airport capacity plan and could become an accepted EU-wide air transport forecasting mechanism. They requested the Commission to report to Parliament before 2009 on a **master plan** for enhanced airport capacity in Europe. This report should lay down a cohesive approach for Member States in order to promote and coordinate any national and cross-border initiative for building new airport capacities dedicated to international traffic and make better use of existing capacities. Members stressed that the hubs and the regional airports, through point-to-point travel, could each in their own way and according to specific constraints of the various Member States respond to the environmental problems, to congestion problems and challenges facing accessibility. Only the cohabitation of various airport models according to national specificities would enable the EU to fulfil its needs in this field. They also stressed the economic importance of airports for job creation, particularly at regional level. The report invited Member States and regional and local authorities to take account of environmental factors when deciding where to locate airports, including noise, emissions, road traffic density in the vicinity of the airport, the proximity of fuel tanks, and of meteorological factors.

- promoting environmentally-friendly growth: Parliament stressed that the objective of the industry is to cut emissions by a further 50% by 2020. Nevertheless, despite this progress, the growth in air traffic had resulted in a sharp increase in the total volume of greenhouse gas emissions produced by this sector (+100% compared to 1990, according to estimates by the European Environment Agency), and airport congestion was contributing significantly to this. Parliament welcomed the Commission initiative to incorporate aviation into the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS). It pointed out that the effectiveness of measures designed to reduce the environmental impact of air transport also depended on the policies pursued by countries at global level and stressed the need to establish joint programmes with third countries. Members considered that the issue of greenhouse gas emissions should be tackled with more vigour at both European and international levels with a view to improving the competitiveness of a more sustainable EU air transport sector. They called on the Commission and the Member States to use all available means to reach an agreement on this issue at international level. They particularly insisted on the need to develop regulatory and financial schemes in order to encourage the retrofitting and renewal of fleets and promote the environmental performance of engines, the corollary of which is to render them quieter, more energy efficient and less polluting.

- ensuring the correct implementation and adaptation of the regulatory framework: Parliament considered that the increase in air traffic will require a fuller implementation of the legal framework applicable to air transport. It asked the Commission to check the full implementation of Regulation 95/93, as amended by Regulation No 793/2004, on common rules for the allocation of slots at Community airports and to provide more guidance and clarification as regards the text. It particularly insisted on the need to ensure a better coordination of, and matching between, the allocation of slots by Air Traffic Flow Management (AFTM) and airport slots, and on the need to harmonise the definitions, tolerances and the way airport and AFTM slots are awarded. The Council was asked to lay down a time-frame and deadlines in order to enhance cooperation between civil aviation authorities of neighbouring Member States so as to guarantee a significant step forward before 2008 as regards the building of functional airspace blocks.

- **enhancing cooperation on capacity between airport regions**: Members were of the opinion that an increase in airport capacity would not be possible without efficient and thorough collaboration between airport authorities and the relevant regional and local administrations, provided that any such collaboration does not contravene Community competition rules. They called on the Commission and the Member States to facilitate the exchange of best practice concerning the public management of those airport regions and to support financially pilot projects and research programmes connected with the issue of the impact that airports have on surrounding territories and their residents.

- **ground handling services**: the report invited the Commission to carry out a new impact analysis on the implementation of Directive 96/67/EC, its final benefits and/or disadvantages for users, employees and passengers, before making any proposal that would lead to further liberalisation. It recommended that any new attempt to amend the Directive should first concentrate on the quality of ground handling services and on the quality of employment in ground handling. It particularly invited the Commission to: (i) examine the possibility of establishing minimum quality and social standards that should be taken into account in the selection procedure and inserted in contracts between the airline and the service provider; (ii) frame the use of subcontracting by ensuring a minimum level of safety/quality levels for providers in order to secure fair competition and require the prior identification of any subcontractors; (iii) define and clearly establish the conditions under which an airport can provide ground handling services, especially when a sufficient number of independent service suppliers is willing to provide these services; (iv) consider that the minimum number of service providers admitted at airports (currently two) should be reviewed by the Commission and be increased particularly in the case of large airports;(v) put in place a licensing procedure at Member State level in order to guarantee that a minimum level of quality become mandatory for providers; (vi) ensure that providers guarantee an adequate level of training and social protection for their employees; (vii) ensure the appropriate level of security and safety for all users, passengers and cargo.