

Allocation of slots at Community airports

2020/0042(COD) - 13/03/2020 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to allow airlines to adapt their capacity in view of the reduced demand caused by the coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19).

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: the current [Regulation \(EEC\) No 95/93](#) contains a ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ rule, whereby air carriers must use at least 80% of their allocated slots within a given scheduling period (summer or winter) in order to keep precedence in respect of the same series of slots within the corresponding scheduling period of the next year (so-called ‘grandfather rights’).

Due to the reduced demand for passenger traffic caused by the coronavirus outbreak, air carriers have already started and will continue to cancel flights, which will result in slot usage for the winter 2019-2020 and summer 2020 scheduling periods below the 80 % threshold imposed by the Regulation.

According to Eurocontrol, the number of flights fell by 10% in the first two weeks of March 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. Given the decreasing demand caused by the crisis, most European air carriers are grounding aircraft.

European airports expect a loss of 67 million passengers in the first quarter of 2020. This phenomenon is seriously affecting air transport across the Union.

On the basis of the information currently available from Eurocontrol, from air carriers and from airports, it is reasonable to assume that the current situation, characterised by an exceptional fall in demand, will last at least for the months of March, April, May and June 2020.

In the absence of any measure neutralising, for the purposes of this calculation, the effects of the current circumstances, it is likely that air carriers will operate many flights with very low load factors in order to protect their grandfather rights, thus exacerbating financial losses and causing an adverse impact on the environment.

CONTENT: in order to allow airlines to adapt their capacity in light of the decline in demand caused by the epidemic, and to protect the financial health of airlines and the environment, the Commission proposes to amend Regulation (EEC) No 95/93 in order to protect the grandfather rights of air carriers for those slots that have not been used during the period when the aviation market has been most affected by the outbreak of the SARS CoV-2 (COVID-19).

The proposed period covers the four-month period between March 2020 and June 2020 for all flights.

The proposed amendment would come in form of a rule whereby coordinators shall consider slots allocated for the reference periods in question as having been operated. This rule would mitigate the effects of the current crisis and provide legal certainty to the air carriers for the relevant parts of the scheduling periods. Any slots freed by air carriers as a result could be reallocated by coordinators according to needs.

The Commission may extend the period during which the measures are applicable, if necessary by means of delegated acts. The Commission shall base such decisions on the most recent information available, published by Eurocontrol, and on relevant scientific advice.

Additionally, given that the severe impact of the outbreak of the SARS CoV-2 virus became apparent first in China and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, it is proposed to protect during a longer overall period the grandfathering rights for slots used for air services to and from those markets. The additional period starts on 23 January 2020, the date on which the first airport in the People's Republic of China was closed by the authorities.