

Access to the groundhandling market at Community airports

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The rapporteur considered that the draft Directive on this issue was incomplete. On the one hand, it did not distinguish between public and private airports; on the other hand, it did not give any consideration to the social consequences of the liberalisation of air traffic. Mr SEAL did not wish to see complete deregulation, which would lead to a poorer service, as in the United Kingdom. Instead he was in favour of a controlled system of competition, which made it possible to safeguard jobs. He also proposed that a committee of users' representatives be set up and be involved in decision-making at airports. As regards the scope of the Directive, Mr SEAL felt that it should apply to airports with traffic of 4.5 million passengers a year and that it should be tested in larger airports before being applied in smaller airports. According to Commissioner KINNOCK, the groundhandling market should be opened up to allow air carriers to obtain services at a reasonable price. He pointed out that all interests had to be taken into consideration, particularly those of airports and travellers. He also stressed that a transitional period would be required for the liberalisation of groundhandling services in order to avoid any negative social upheaval. He therefore approved the idea of setting limits on the number of service providers with a view to ensuring a fair approach to the liberalisation of groundhandling services. The Commission could take over Amendments Nos 1 and 2, which bolstered the social aspects, Amendment No 14 on safety, Amendment No 22, which determined the number of people authorised to self-handle, and Amendment No 33 on the date for application of the Directive by the Member States. It also took over in part the following amendments: Amendments Nos 20 and 21 on the committee of users' representatives and on cleaning services and the transport of passengers, baggage and freight on the ramp, Amendment No 23 on the operational management of central infrastructures, and Amendments Nos 24, 27 and 28, which improved the original text. Other amendments were taken over in principle: Amendments Nos 2, 5, 34 and 35, which related to the social aspects, Amendment No 11 on transparency and Amendments Nos 16, 17, 26 and 29, which clarified the text. Others would have to be reworded: Amendments Nos 40, 41, 42, 50 and 51. However, the Commission could not take over Amendments Nos 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13 and 15 (as they gave Member States rather than the Commission the power to suspend the rights of suppliers and users), and 19, 25, 30, 31, 32, 36, 43, 44, 46 and 48. Similarly, Amendments Nos 37, 39, 45, 47 and 49, which established the threshold of 4.5 million passengers per year for application of the Directive, could not be taken over as the number of airports concerned in the EU would be reduced from 50 to 30, which would result in an imbalance. However, the Commissioner could accept the figure of 2 million so that the Directive could be applied to the smaller airports.