Air transport: protection of passengers

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PURPOSE : to present a Communication from the Commission concerning the protection of air passengers in the European Union. CONTENT : following a Commission document sent out for consultation in January 2000 relating to the protection of air passengers, the Commission has made a detailed analysis of all the responses and then selected the areas where Community action to improve consumer protection was justified. The present Communication concentrates on these aspects. The Commission will therefore propose legislation in order to: - enable delayed passengers to continue their journeys under good conditions, by giving them the right either to reimbursement of the ticket or to an alternative flight at the earliest as possible; - create new rights for passengers, by setting minimum requrements for contracts in air travel; - give passengers information they need to make well-founded choices between airlines, by requiring airlines to submit the data necessary for it to publish regular consumer reports (2000). These would also stimulate airlines to improve service quality. Furthermore, the Commission will promote the preparation and adoption of voluntary commitments by European airlines (2000-2001), covering in particular: - improvement of service quality as widely as possible, for example by offering the lowest fare available, by allowing reservations to be held for a certain time, by informing passengers rapidly of delays, by meeting needs of disabled people and by facilitating the lodging of complaints; - adequate care for delayed passengers; - simple procedures for lodging complaints and mechanisms for setting disputes out-of-court. It will also promote voluntary commitments by airports to set quality standards for services and to consider design standards for terminals. These voluntary codes should be ambitious, engage as many operators as possible and include mechanisms for monitoring compliance. The Commission will strongly encourage the involvement of all interested parties and co-ordination when the responsibilities of airlines and airports overlap. In addition, the Commission will aslo take these initiatives: - to discuss how best to strengthen the representation of passengers with Member States and passengers' organisations, (2000); - to examine the effects on the market of sales and reservations via the Internet and their conformity with competition rules of the Code of Conduct for computerised reservation systems, (2000); - to study the effects on competition of code-sharing, in the context of individual competition proceedings, and of tariff co-ordination in interlining, in its review of block exemption for interlining, (2001); - to assess the impact of cabin conditions on passengers' health, by setting up expert groups to scrutinise existing research and draw conclusions on risks to health, (2001).