The European airline industry: competitiveness, from singlemarket to world-wide challenges

1999/2113(COS) - 22/03/2000

The committee adopted the report by Dirk STERCKX (ELDR, B) on the Commission communication on the European airline industry. MEPs stressed once again that the creation of a single European airspace was vital for the future of the EU's civil aviation industry. In 1999, air passengers had suffered the worst delays ever, with one flight in three being delayed because of the current patchwork of EU air traffic control systems. A single European airspace would benefit all its users, civil and military, regardless of borders. The report pointed out that the airline industry still suffered from serious shortcomings, in particular regarding the costs of using infrastructure, the development of an external dimension in the EU's aviation policy, free competition, the environment, intermodality and passengers' rights. Liberalisation had had a beneficial impact but there still was an urgent need for restructuring. In competition with carriers from the US, the European aviation industry continued to display clear weaknesses. The sector was still faced with a number of external factors which pushed up costs. A key problem was market access. Airlines wanting to offer new routes had problems in obtaining a slot, i.e. an arrival and departure time at an airport. The existing directive of 1993 was still giving too much protection to incumbent carriers, who benefited from unrestricted "grandfather" rights. The Commission was urged to revise the present system of slot allocations. Finally the Commission was called on to present a proposal on flight and duty times for air crews, air traffic control personnel and common training and licensing standards for all flight and cabin crew members.