Air transport: protection of passenger rights, denied boarding compensation system

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Proposals to tackle the overbooking problems of which most airlines are guilty were endorsed by the Committee, when the report by Antonio GONZALEZ TRIVINO (ERA, E) on amending Regulation EEC 295/91 establishing common rules for denied-boarding compensation in scheduled air transport was adopted unanimously. Committee members welcomed the Commission's proposal and said that better protection should be given to the thousands of air passengers who, every year in the EU, are refused seats even when they have booked them in advance. The committee adopted amendments aimed at much stricter rules for air carriers. The rules cover a better compensation system for passengers (and the amounts to be paid), the problems of cancelled flights, upgrading/downgrading and more and better information on displaying the denied-boarding rules in plain, intelligible language. In future, and under certain conditions, an air carrier will, immediately after boarding has been denied, have to pay at least the following amounts in compensation: ECU 185 for flights of up to 3500 km and ECU 370 for flights of more than 3500 km. This compensation must be paid in cash, by bank transfer or, with the signed agreement of the passenger, in the form of travel vouchers and/or other services. As some of the worst offenders are third-country airlines, the rapporteur proposes that, in addition to the rules on denied boarding forming part of a carrier's "conditions of carriage", member states should make explicit mention of the rules when issuing permits to foreign carriers operating on EU territory.