

Resolution on the air transport agreement between the EC and the USA

2007/2525(RSP) - 14/03/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the conclusion of the Air Transport Agreement between the EC and its Member States, and the United States of America (USA). Recent negotiations have led to the draft agreement of 2 March 2007. Parliament welcomed the draft agreement as an important step towards an integrated transatlantic aviation market that will be to the benefit of consumers. It felt that the EU-US aviation agreement was important not only in its own right but also as a model for later agreements.

However, Parliament would have preferred the conclusion of one balanced overall agreement covering all aspects of market opening and regulatory convergence to a phased approach employing partial agreements, and, accordingly, it welcomed Article 21 of the draft agreement containing a clear timetable for negotiations on a second-stage agreement, including provisions allowing parties to suspend rights specified in the first-stage agreement, if 30 months after the start of negotiations on a second-stage agreement no such agreement has been reached.

Market opening: a new EU-US aviation agreement should be balanced in terms of market access, considering also such issues as cabotage, right of establishment, ownership and de facto control and state aid. Parliament regretted that no progress had been made on cabotage and that the possibility for EU carriers to exercise effective control over a US airline was still limited, even with the extended ownership clauses. It emphasised that government subsidies to airlines could distort competition and called upon both parties to keep their use to a minimum while welcoming at the same time procedures under which parties could inform each other and discuss measures taken by either side. Parliament also noted that the development of regulatory convergence was only partially dealt with in the draft agreement, which mainly concerned provisions on safety and security, with very little reference to environmental and social aspects.

Safety and security: Parliament called on the Commission and the US to review the efficiency of the additional security measures enforced since 2001 so as to eliminate overlapping and weak links in the security chain. It emphasised that the privacy of European and US citizens should be respected when personal passenger data are exchanged between the EU and the US, in accordance with the criteria called for by the European Parliament in its resolutions of 13 March 2003 and 7 September 2006, and stressed in this connection the urgency of arriving at worldwide standards on data protection and privacy. Parliament also advocated the concept of 'one stop security', checking passengers and luggage only at the start of their journey and not again at every transfer.

Environment: the aviation sector had several negative environmental effects, in particular as a source of noise and as a contributor, like other modes of transport, to climate change. The draft agreement stressed mainly the possible adverse effects of environmental measures and the need to mitigate these, instead of emphasising the need for environmental action in aviation. Accordingly, Parliament underlined the need for both the EU and the US to take effective measures to reduce the negative environmental impact of aviation, without prior exclusion of any regulatory, financial or other instrument to achieve this goal. It welcomed the proposal by the Commission to include aviation in the European emissions trading system to reduce the impact of the aviation sector on climate change. Both EU and US must exchange best practices on noise reduction, acknowledging differences in local circumstances.

Social policy: Parliament called upon US and EU aviation stakeholders to enter into a continuous dialogue on social standards, with the aim of promoting mutual understanding, a level playing field and

high social standards at the same time. It asked the Commission to advocate the inclusion of references to relevant international legislation on social rights in any eventual agreement. EU social legislation should be applied to employees recruited and/or working in the Member States, in particular the Directives concerning the consultation and information of employees (2002/14/EC, 98/59/EC and 80/987/EC), the Directive on the organisation of working time of mobile staff in civil aviation (2000/79/EC) and the Directive concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services (96/71/EC).

Lastly, Parliament asked the Commission to ensure full information and consultation of the European Parliament and of all relevant stakeholders before and throughout second-stage negotiations.