

AEA calls for strict enforcement of Community Guidelines on State Aids



In 2005, following its ruling on state aid granted to Ryanair in Charleroi airport, the European Commission presented a set of Guidelines to clarify how competition rules apply to the financing of airports and to start-up aid granted to airlines by Member States. The text also gave Member States a deadline of 1 June 2007 for amending their existing schemes.

Two years have elapsed since the publication of these Guidelines, and yet very little progress has been achieved in the national implementation – an obvious cause of concern for the Association of European Airlines. In a significant number of cases, as an AEA internal review shows, public funds continue to be paid out to certain no-frills airlines, with blatant disregard for the Community framework.

AEA and its members admittedly have a role to play in making sure that complaints against this type of unfair subsidies are lodged in time, so that an investigation can take place. However, AEA airlines have already lodged a number of complaints over the recent years – with little apparent progress in their handling.

Member States need to be reminded of their obligations as regards Community law, State Aid law and the strict conditions attached to the granting of operational or infrastructural funds. Against all odds, it appears that some Member States are still unaware of the Guidelines, or simply disregard them.

The Association strongly believes that political pressure should come from the European Commission to ensure that the legal framework is respected. The June deadline provides a good opportunity to give this issue the level of urgency and priority it deserves, and to convince all parties to put an end to unfair subsidies at airports. That is why AEA has urged the Commission to allocate adequate resources to the handling of the current complaints.

AEA is now seeking a dialogue with the European Commission to examine together the current practices and explore ways to end the abuses which are unfortunately still commonplace in Europe.

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