

Information

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REGULATING THE AIRLINE/PASSENGER RELATIONSHIP

Network airlines call for a 'light touch', recognising their strong customer focus

Europe's network airlines welcomed the opportunity yesterday to present their views on aspects of customer service to an audience of MEPs and other important decision-makers, as well as consumer representatives, at a workshop organised by Brian Simpson MEP, Chairman of the Parliament's Transport Committee.

In the course of a wide-ranging and constructive discussion, AEA member airlines, who in 2009 carried 246 million passengers within Europe and 326m over a worldwide network spanning 162 countries, presented insights into how they care for their passengers.

"Air travel, in recent years, has progressed far, far beyond the realm of the privileged few", said AEA Secretary General Ulrich Schulte-Strathaus, "and airlines who built their reputations in the days of exclusivity have to confront new market realities. The fact that the European network airlines have managed to balance service quality and respect for the customer with ever more affordable prices should be regarded as a fantastic achievement".

While the overwhelming majority of the AEA airline's customers enjoy an incident-free travel experience, much of the day's business was focused on those occasions when circumstances dictate a disruption to travel plans – delay, cancellation and baggage problems. *"Such occurrences are exceptional and unfortunate", said Mr Schulte-Strathaus, "but it is in such situations that the airline has the chance to demonstrate its consumer focus".*

The workshop also debated other aspects of the airline-passenger relationship, such as the measures airlines take to satisfy customers with special needs, but also the realities of ensuring the safety and security of passengers whose mobility may be restricted. The question of supplying government agencies with passengers' personal data was also addressed; *"whilst we are limited in our influence over governmental security policies, we will speak out against measures which we consider to be intrusive and excessive, and keep our passengers as well-informed as possible about what is expected of them", said the AEA Secretary General.*

- Adria Airways
- Aegean Airlines
- Aer Lingus
- AeroSvit
- airBaltic
- Air France
- Air Malta
- Alitalia
- Austrian
- bmi
- British Airways
- brussels airlines
- Cargolux
- Croatia Airlines
- Cyprus Airways
- Czech Airlines
- DHL
- Finnair
- Iberia
- Icelandair
- Jat Airways
- KLM
- LOT
- Lufthansa
- Luxair
- Malev
- Montenegro Airlines
- Olympic Air
- SAS Scandinavian Airlines
- SWISS
- TAP Portugal
- TAROM
- TNT Airways
- Turkish Airlines
- Ukraine International Airlines
- Virgin Atlantic Airways

There was also discussion on measures available to mitigate the impact of airline bankruptcies. AEA did not believe, said Mr Schulte-Strathaus, that all carriers and their passengers should be subject to a levy to recompense those affected by airline failures. *“Well-managed airlines should not be asked to underwrite the management deficiencies of their competitors”*, he said.

The AEA Secretary General applauded Mr Simpson for the initiative. *“Close to a million passengers a day are a testimony to the value which the community places on air transport. A million daily transactions between airlines and their customers creates an interface that clearly cannot go unregulated, but that regulation needs to have a light touch, to promote rather than constrain a relationship which has a strong tradition of service quality and customer focus”*, said Ulrich Schulte-Strathaus.

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Note to the Editor: The Association of European Airlines (AEA) brings together 36 European established scheduled network carriers. These collectively carry 374 million passengers and 7 million tonnes of cargo each year, operating 2,689 aircraft serving 662 destinations in 162 countries with 11,934 flights a day. They provide around 394,200 jobs directly, and generate a total turnover of €80 billion