

Information

22 April 2010

AIRSPACE CLOSURES – THE HUMAN DIMENSION. “We will fight for our affected passengers” says AEA

After the successive reopening of European air space, countless passengers, who had been stranded for a prolonged period, can be transported home. *“The desire to return home is natural and fundamental to all citizens,”* said Secretary General Ulrich Schulte-Strathaus of the Association of European Airlines, AEA, today. *“The current challenge is that although services have now resumed and schedules are gradually returning to normal, the mass scale of the disruption has left airlines with limited capacity available to repatriate stranded passengers – and of course the passengers with reservations on the scheduled flights also have rights”.* He added that some AEA members were going to extraordinary lengths to repatriate passengers for whom surface transport has been a possibility.

The repatriation of stranded passengers has given rise to another, even more emotionally-charged scenario, that of reimbursement of the accrued costs of these passengers. Many affected passengers are relying on the wording of the EU Regulation on Denied Boarding Compensation.

“European airline passengers benefit from an extraordinarily generous package of rights”, said Mr Schulte-Strathaus; *“more generous than in any other part of the world, and more generous than for other modes of transport. But these rules, which AEA airlines respect, were designed for an event horizon encompassing isolated incidents, involving individual airlines, not a prolonged disruption of all services.”*

“Common sense must prevail”, he said. *“Industry passengers are suffering from the consequences of a natural phenomenon. What is required, as with any other similar natural event, is EU solidarity. Passengers affected by this crisis should be recompensed through appropriate public funds”.*

The Secretary General expressed AEA's strong appreciation of the response of European Commission President Barroso in setting up a Task Force at the highest political level, to review the impact of the airspace closures on the aviation sector and to consider possible relief measures. *“The Commissioner for Transport accelerated the return to normal services; he is finalising proposals to stabilise operations and settle compensation claims. This is appropriate and timely – solutions have to be found for the current situation, and any similar occurrences in the future. In our discussions with the Commission we will fight for the allocation of public funds for passengers”.*

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- Aer Lingus
- AeroSvit
- airBaltic
- Air France
- Air Malta
- Alitalia
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- brussels airlines
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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 347 million passengers and 6 million tonnes of cargo each year, operating 2,160 aircraft serving 662 destinations in 162 countries with 11,400 flights a day. They provide around 385,000 jobs directly, and generate a total turnover of €70 billion