COVID-19: Council agrees its position on helping airlines by suspending slot requirements

The EU is taking urgent measures to suspend temporarily the airport slot requirements which oblige airlines to use at least 80% of their take-off and landing slots in order to keep them the following year. Today, member states’ ambassadors in the Council’s Permanent Representatives Committee approved a mandate for the presidency to negotiate with the European Parliament a proposal to waive this ‘use it or lose it’ rule until 24 October 2020 to help air carriers cope with the sharp drop in demand caused by the coronavirus outbreak and the measures to contain it.

"This slot waiver will provide the necessary flexibility and certainty for our aviation industry in this unprecedented situation. Nobody wants empty planes in the sky, and it is an absolute priority for the Croatian presidency to have this amendment adopted as soon as possible." Oleg Butković, Croatian Minister for the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure, President of the Council

Under the mandate, the waiver will apply from 1 March to 24 October 2020, to cover the entire summer season. It will also apply retroactively from 23 January to 29 February 2020 for flights between the EU and China or Hong Kong. The start date of 23 January is when the first airport was closed by the authorities in China.

If the current serious situation persists, the measure can be extended quickly by means of a Commission delegated act.

Introducing the slot waiver requires an amendment to the EU slots regulation. Similar amendments have been triggered by other emergencies, including the 2002 terrorist attacks, the Iraq war and the SARS outbreak in 2003, and the financial crisis in 2009.

The amendment needs to be approved by both the Council and the European Parliament. Both institutions are working to finalise the proposal as a matter of urgency.

For more information:

Regulation 95/93 on common rules for the allocation of slots at Community airports

Slots (background information)
COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak (background information)

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