



ECA Piloting
Safety
European Cockpit Association

3 December 2020

Subject: Europeans for Fair Competition (E4FC) and the European Cockpit Association (ECA) call for the postponement and the re-assessment of pending comprehensive air transport agreements

Dear Minister,

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen an unprecedented impact on the EU airline industry that is fighting for survival as airlines have been forced to ground the biggest part of their fleet. Hundreds of thousands of jobs in the industry are in jeopardy and recovery of the passenger demand in Europe is not expected to reach the 2019 levels again before 2024¹, even with COVID-19 vaccines becoming available in the near future.

Under the current circumstances, any extra capacity to the EU market by granting additional rights to third countries would negatively impact the recovery of the EU aviation industry and would put additional jobs at risk. This is particularly problematic when additional rights are granted to countries that systematically provide their national airlines with unlimited financial support, enabling these airlines to offer (currently) commercially unviable frequencies on the EU market.

In March 2019, the European Commission and the State of Qatar finalised the negotiations of a comprehensive air transport agreement that would upgrade the rules and standards between the two parties. For the agreement to enter into force, the signature by the Council of the EU is required, which has not yet taken place². In addition, the European Commission is currently negotiating comprehensive air transport agreements with the Sultanate of Oman and with the ASEAN bloc.

Once the agreements with the State of Qatar, the Sultanate of Oman and ASEAN are signed and applied, they would allow for an immediate substantial addition of capacity to the EU market. **Currently, demand for long-haul travel remains close to zero.³ Most airlines do not expect a return of traffic to the 2019 levels before 2024.** The described change of circumstances will radically impact the obligations of the EU and its Member States under the agreement: Member States would have to grant increasing market access to the airlines

¹ <https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/pr/2020-07-28-02/>

² Delayed due to the territorial dispute over Gibraltar between the United Kingdom and Spain

³ <https://www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/publications/economic-reports/Flexibility-will-be-critical-to-restart/>



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subject to these agreements before it is clear how international aviation will develop in the coming months and years. **Therefore, the EU and its Member States should conduct an impact assessment of COVID-19 allowing to carefully re-assess and, if appropriate, re-negotiate the agreements,** just like the EU is re-assessing other legislations (i.e. Airport Charges Directive or the Performance and Charging Regulation for the Single European Sky).

As such, E4FC and ECA are jointly calling for **suspending the signature of the agreement** with the State of Qatar as well as **postponing the ongoing negotiations** with the Sultanate of Oman and ASEAN until there is more clarity on how international aviation will develop in the coming years following the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, the suspension of the agreements would also allow the European Commission and its Member States to **re-assess and possibly amend the provisions of these agreements** in order to safeguard fair competition with European airlines and to ensure the recovery of the European aviation industry and protection of its jobs.

We trust you will take our position into consideration when discussing these agreements within the Council of the EU.

We remain at your disposal should you need further information, and we look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

Europeans for Fair Competition (E4FC) and the European Cockpit Association (ECA)

About E4FC

Europeans for Fair Competition (E4FC) is a coalition of European airlines and unions representing airline employees fighting for fair competition and high social standards with the objective to safeguard European aviation, European jobs and to sustain connectivity for Europe's citizens.

www.e4fc.eu

About ECA

European Cockpit Association (ECA) is the representative body of European pilot associations, representing over 40.000 pilots from across Europe, striving for the highest levels of aviation safety and fostering social rights and quality employment in Europe.

www.eurocockpit.be