



Statement by Commissioner Adina Vălean on the Commission's intention to extend the airport slot waiver

Brussels, 14 September 2020

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a tremendous impact on air travel and the aviation sector as a whole. Today's report shows that air traffic levels remain low, and more importantly, they are not likely to recover in the near future. In this context, the lack of certainty over slots makes it difficult for airlines to plan their schedules, making planning difficult for airports and passengers. To address the need for certainty and responding to traffic data, I intend to extend the slot waiver for the 2020/2021 winter season, until 27 March 2021.

I appreciate that industry stakeholders – airports, airlines, and slot-coordinators – have reached an agreement on how to mitigate these problems, and I would like to highlight the importance of this agreement. Airlines will now be able to start planning and making available any excess airport capacity for others to use. I expect the industry to abide by the agreed conditions voluntarily during the 2020/2021 winter season, pending the adoption of fully enforceable conditions - that it is based on this understanding that we intend to grant the full season waiver right away.

The initial slot waiver – adopted in the early days of the crisis – has allowed airlines to make financially sound decisions on whether to run flights, as well as avoid ghost flights. Nonetheless, our report also highlights certain problems with the current waiver, which are preventing airlines from using airport capacity efficiently. Slots are not always relinquished in time for other users or airports to plan operations as they would like; competition may also be distorted if airlines seek to benefit by increasing their market presence without using their slots and airport capacity correctly. Such behavior can hamper competition and can, therefore, harm EU passengers and freight customers. This must be remedied.

Now it is also the time to start reflecting on how to return to a normal slot regime once air traffic picks up to more stable levels. The Commission is currently consulting the public and stakeholders on this initiative, and I hope to present a proposal before the end of the year.

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