



# EU PACKAGE FOR BETTER AIRPORT MANAGEMENT

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Member States of the European Union are currently studying proposals that the European Commission has adopted in the form of an 'airport package' consisting of three key initiatives. One proposal is about a directive on airport charges. The second initiative consists of a communication on airport capacity, efficiency and safety in Europe. A report on the implementation of the ground-handling directive forms part of the Commission's third initiative as part of this 'airport package'. The package focuses on the role of airports in the further development and competitiveness of the European internal aviation market. The package will mark the future of airport regulation in Europe by ensuring convergence in regulations between EU Member States.

The Commission acknowledges that Member States still retain competency over the management of airports and spatial planning. However, the Commission is insisting that for instance, in the case of airport charges, there must be some kind of mechanism in place that would ensure greater transparency on the price and cost of airport taxes that consumers are made to pay when they purchase their air tickets. The proposed directive on airport charges is the result of consultations that were held with airport authorities and users.

The legislative proposal in airport charges obliges airport authorities and airport users to exchange information. The text also requires air operators to be consulted before the final decision is made on the amount of airport tariff to be charged. Airport operators will be able to vary the charges in relation to the quality of service provided. To ensure that there is no discrimination in airport charging, the Commission is proposing the setting up of an independent national monitoring authority. This authority would give the opportunity for both airport operators and airport users to appeal should users challenge a decision either to alter airport charges or to amend the system of charges. The directive provides for the creation of such an authority in every Member State in order to guarantee the impartiality of decisions, and appropriate and effective implementation of the directive. The proposed directive would also require Member States to ensure that, every year, airport operators provide air operators or their representatives with information on how the airport charges were calculated. The draft directive also proposes to require airport operators to inform airlines of plans for major alterations to the airport infrastructure when these could have an effect on the level of charges.

Regarding ground-handling services, which were liberalised by a directive in 1997, the report should in time allow their competitiveness to be further enhanced.

The communication on airport capacity, accompanied by an action plan, proposes the implementation of an 'observatory'. This observatory, made up of experts from the Commission, Member States and industry, would monitor airport capacity and regulating and resolving congestion problems as a result of increased air traffic. The observatory will be managed by Eurocontrol and will help in introducing harmonisation and standardisation of methods that are used to calculate airport capacity.

The report on application of the 1996 directive on ground-handling services concludes that the law has contributed to the introduction of competition in some airports which were previously closed markets. ■