



ECA
Piloting Safety

Mrs Adina-Ioana Vălean,
Commissioner for Transport
Berlaymont
Brussels

Sent by email: Adina-Ioana.Valean@ec.europa.eu
cc: Henrik.Hololei@ec.europa.eu

Mr Nicolas Schmit
Commissioner for Jobs & Social Rights
Berlaymont
Brussels

Sent by email: nicolas.schmit@ec.europa.eu
cc: adam.pokorny@ec.europa.eu

Brussels, 20 March 2020

ECA: Open letter re. Impact of COVID-19 on pilots' profession

Dear Mrs Vălean, Dear Mr Schmit,

The ongoing, fast-evolving COVID-19 crisis with the extremely severe knock-on effects on the economy represents an unprecedented challenge for our European societies. It is our collective responsibility, with the European institutions and national authorities at the forefront, to step up to this challenge.

High-performing air mobility is one of the foundations of any strong and prosperous economy. What matters today is therefore to **preserve a functioning European air transport industry, as essential long-term public infrastructure, and as a significant provider of high-quality jobs for European citizens**, in the public interest. All airlines should strive together with their staff representatives to safeguard their employees and assets, through this unprecedented crisis

ECA welcomes the first measures announced by the European Commission (such as the waiving of 'use-it-or-lose-it' rules for airport slots) and the broad consensus that full flexibility be granted regarding EU competition and state aid rules, allowing potential nationalisation of companies if needed or use of bridging loans with no limit in amount or time.

Specifically, as regards the **pilot profession, which is one of the most crucial components for making a swift & sustainable upswing possible after the crisis**, ECA calls on the European Commission to

1. Adopt and communicate the principle that it is a matter of **public interest to preserve a functioning aviation public infrastructure**:
 - o to enable and support rapid repair of the wider economy when we emerge from this damaging crisis; and

- to preserve and support the continued employment of EU citizens in the high-quality jobs provided by the aviation sector, so that our economy is ready for the eventual upswing, and for the shorter-term economic resilience it will bring.
2. Promote, and where at all possible require, that airline managements follow a **socially responsible approach** in the measures they take. The Commission's and airlines' priority cannot be commercial interest for the time being, but must be about preservation, survival, and seeing what they can do to contribute to the wider needs of our society.

This means:

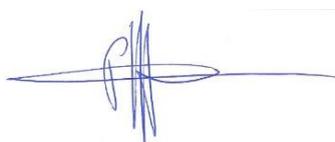
- Providing **support for management and unions to work together** to balance companies' needs for survival, and pilots' and workers' future. This must be an obligation, and where airlines do not take this path there should be no support provided.
 - Providing **support to avoid lay-offs**, pay cuts, forced reduced working time, stand down and redundancy to the maximum extent possible. Any concrete or financial support should incentivise this approach.
 - **Measures should be temporary**, and see a return to the status quo after the crisis. Any support should incentivise this approach.
3. Adopt measures that prevent delays and avoids costs in retraining or recertification when activity resumes. However, exemption measures aimed at extending the validity period of ratings, certificates and medicals, must be harmonised, preceded by a thorough risk assessment and accompanied by appropriate mitigating measures. **Safety must never be compromised.**
4. Develop a **European unemployment reinsurance scheme** and give the profession access to the European Social Fund.
5. Develop specific economic support measures to facilitate **access for laid off aircrew to training simulators for the purpose of retraining** to changed industry needs, and to retain their competency and skill base, remaining 'current' for the duration of unemployment. That way, pilots will keep their competencies/skills base, and licenses, allowing them to reintegrate to the market when activity resumes.
6. Be aware that the extraordinary **character of the situation is already being used as 'cover' for opportunistic and 'predatory' behaviors from certain airlines**. It is inexcusable in the present situation for a company to act without solidarity at the expense of others, for example by cutting the workforce or their terms and conditions further than necessary, or favouring lower quality jobs at the expense of higher quality ones. Action should be taken to block or provide consequences for such behavior.

We count on your leadership, your cabinets and services to tackle head-on this major crisis and remain at your disposal for any further discussion.

Yours sincerely,



Jon Horne
ECA President



Philip von Schöppenthau
Secretary General