

PRESS RELEASE

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Disruption in the sky: EU Commission pushing for new flight rules

The safety of millions of European air passengers will be subject to a decisive vote in the European Parliament (EP), in one week's time (30 Sept.). At stake are new rules for EU-wide Flight Time Limitations (FTL) for pilots and cabin crew, which the EP Transport Committee will decide upon. The new rules, proposed by the EU Commission, have been widely criticized as “unsafe” and not scientifically-based. Pilots and cabin crew, who in January staged ‘walkouts’ across Europe to warn about the dangers of aircrew fatigue, consider this proposal unacceptable and call for its rejection by the European Parliament.

“The Commission seems to be imposing its political decisions while tossing away the justified concerns of pilots, cabin crews and fatigue safety experts,” says Nico Voorbach, President of the European Cockpit Association, and a pilot himself. “The new rules will only worsen the situation of air crews flying while dangerously fatigued. Would you get onboard a plane if you knew that the pilot will have been awake for 22 hours when landing? In the future, you wouldn't have a choice.”

“The proposed rules contain a large number of provisions that are counter to what scientific experts consider safe,” says Philip von Schöppenthau, ECA Secretary General, “and several provisions constitute an outright risk to flight safety.” Among the most striking examples are the proposed standby provisions and night flights. Whilst the Commission allows 11–12hrs30 flight time at night, scientific experts consistently recommended a maximum of 10hrs as being the safe limit. “Beyond that, air crews experience critically high levels of fatigue, which impairs our ability to operate the aircraft safely,” explains Voorbach.

“The proposal also allows crews to be on standby for 8hrs and to consequently take a flight duty of up to 14hrs, landing after 22+hrs on duty/awake. “This is simply not safe,” says Elisabetta Chicca, ETF Cabin Crew Chair.

“The Commission proposal is a blunt example of the democratic deficit in the EU. While Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) will only have the right to say “yes” or “no” to the new rules, they won't be able to put under scrutiny many substantive provisions,” says François Ballester, ETF Political Secretary for Aviation. “MEPs have a democratic mandate and it is time for them to say ‘stop’. The only thing they need is 5 minutes of political courage to dare to reject the Commission proposal, so it can be improved in line with what Europe's citizens expect. Not doing so would be irresponsible.”

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Note to editors: ECA is the representative body of European pilot associations, representing over 38.000 pilots from across Europe. Website: www.eurocockpit.be & www.dead-tired.eu

ETF represents 100,000 aircrews across Europe and more than 2.5 million transport workers from 243 transport unions and 41 European Countries. ETF Website: <http://www.itfglobal.org/etf/index.cfm>