

ACI EUROPE

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Airports welcome EC slot waiver but urge Governments to rethink flight bans

Brussels, 13 March 2020: Europe's airports welcomed the approach taken by the EC today to give airlines an exceptional and time-limited waiver on the airport slot "use-it-or-lose-it" rule until 30 June 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. ACI EUROPE thanks Commissioner Vălean for this proposal, which now needs to be swiftly adopted by the European Parliament and EU States.

Such a waiver will give airlines the legal certainty that they can suspend routes and cut the capacity they offer without losing their future entitlement to slots they will not be using at congested airports.

It is critical that unused slots covered by the waiver are returned by airlines to slot coordinators for reallocation in a timely manner – as required by the Commission's proposal. This will notably facilitate continued air connectivity – including for essential cargo and medical supplies – at a critical time. Any further extension of the waiver beyond 30 June 2020 should be based on evidence and in consultation with the airport industry and slot coordinators.

Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE said: *"By supporting our airline clients in these exceptional circumstances, this time-limited slot waiver is obviously in the long-term interest of airports. It will especially help those airlines with a significant presence at congested airports mitigate the harsh financial impact of COVID-19 - while also ensuring that they can preserve the integrity of their route network once demand recovers. But, this necessary focus on the longer-term comes with short-term sacrifice for airports. They will be hit by further losses in air traffic and connectivity, especially as Governments in Europe and beyond are now adopting flight bans and restricting international air travel."*

With Austria being the latest EU country to issue a flight ban for a number of other European countries, about 10 EU States have now adopted such bans or other measures restricting air connectivity. These restrictions have been rushed through and it is questionable whether due consideration has been given to the recommendations¹ of the World Health Organization (WHO) in relation to COVID-19.

The WHO continues to advise against travel restrictions to countries experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks, stating that *"in general, evidence shows that restricting the (international) movement of people during public health emergencies is ineffective in most situations"*. The WHO recognises that restrictions on international air travel can be justified at the beginning of an outbreak, to prevent or at best delay imported cases from other countries. But once local (community) transmission occurs, these restrictions no longer serve their purpose. The fact that Italy was the first European country to ban all flights to China but still became the European epicenter of the COVID-19 epidemic is a case in point.

Jankovec commented: *"While the EU balks at the imposition of a transatlantic travel ban by the US, an increasing number of EU countries are imposing their own unilateral restrictions to air connectivity within*

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¹ WHO ["Recommendations for international traffic in relation to COVID-19"](#)

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Europe. Besides further damaging European aviation and worsening the economic fallout of COVID-19, the fact that these measures do not appear aligned with WHO recommendations raises serious doubts as to their effectiveness."

Transport Ministers will hold an ad hoc Council meeting on 18 March. ACI EUROPE urges the Commission and EU States to ensure coordinated, proportionate and fully WHO compliant COVID-19 policies, as well as supporting measures which take the entire aviation sector into account.

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*ACI EUROPE is the European region of Airports Council International (ACI), the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over **500 airports** in 45 European countries. Our members facilitate over 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe: **2.3 billion passengers, 21.2 million tonnes of freight** and **25.7 million aircraft movements** in 2018. In response to the Climate Emergency, in June 2019 our members committed to achieve **Net Zero** carbon emissions for operations under their control **by 2050**, without offsetting.*

EVERY FLIGHT BEGINS AT THE AIRPORT.