

[REDACTED]
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1040 Brussels
Belgium

Amstelveen, 10 July 2020

Subject: Extension EU Slot Waiver for Winter 2020/21

Dear [REDACTED],

We are writing to you on behalf of the airline members of the Board of Airline Representatives in the Netherlands (BARIN) and of KLM Royal Dutch Airlines.

COVID-19 has caused an unprecedented crisis. Aviation has been amongst the sectors hit hardest and is expected to be one of the last to recover. IATA estimates that a return to 2019 levels is not expected before 2023. In week 25 (15 – 21 June), we still saw air traffic reduced by -77.9%.¹ So 190,615 fewer flights in Europe than the same period the year before. Although European countries are slowly relaxing measures and coming out of lockdown, other parts of the world are in the midst of the crisis such as the US, Brazil and other parts of South America. For many 3rd countries there is still a restriction on non-essential travel into the EU.

The next months until there is a vaccine, which is also available to the wider public, the uncertainty will remain. Europeans are concerned about health facilities in other countries and local flare-ups in Europe (e.g. Portugal most recently) and elsewhere which all result in low confidence and historically low booking numbers. This uncertainty is also fed by the possibility that a “second wave” of the COVID-19 virus will hit Europe in the autumn.

IATA forecasts a decline of around 50% in air passenger volumes this year. EUROCONTROL Draft Traffic Scenarios estimate a reduction of air traffic between 30% and 45% in October 2020 compared to October 2019 levels. The data also show that air traffic volumes will still be 15% to 25% lower in February 2021 compared to February 2019 levels.² Looking at the meagre number of bookings for the second half of 2020, flights are expected to remain (half) empty also for the IATA Winter Season commencing 25 October. Forced flying with low load factors to retain slots - in order to comply with the 80/20 rule for the next equivalent season - translates into additional costs and unnecessary CO2 emissions to the detriment of the environment. It takes away financing that is better spent on sustainable connectivity in the future and frankly, survival, for many airlines.

¹ Source: EUROCONTROL, June 2020

² <https://www.eurocontrol.int/sites/default/files/2020-04/eurocontrol-aviation-recovery-factsheet-27042020.pdf>

In the current uncertain context and taking in the gloomy forecasts, it is crucial that the aviation sector in Europe has the flexibility to react to developments, fluctuations in demand and possible new restrictions swiftly. In order to be flexible, it is fundamental that the current EU Slots Waiver is extended to include the IATA Northern Winter Season 2020/2021 (from 25 October until and including 27 March 2021). This should be done as quickly as possible through an EC Delegated Act using the urgency procedure provided for in Regulation (EU) 2020/459.

If the EU Slots Waiver is not prolonged, airlines will continue to fly to keep their slots for the next year. Even airlines that are less financially stable will do this. It will push more carriers to (the brink of) bankruptcy. This could really change the aviation landscape in a very negative way. The EU and its citizens are helped with a healthy and competitive aviation market with many different European carriers and routes to provide the best services and ensure rich connectivity within Europe and with the rest of the world.

We need clarity as soon as possible. A sector that is hit so hard cannot be burdened with costly multiple planning scenarios. Without clarity now, airlines need to anticipate various scenarios. It is costly, time-consuming and uncertain to plan the operation of aircraft, staff and requires putting costly resources 'on stand-by' without knowing if these will need to be used. Moreover, we want to provide our passengers with clarity as soon as possible on a slimmed down but robust schedule for the Winter Season. This is essential to bring confidence back. We are truly concerned that many do not understand the urgency and we really ask you to ensure that the Commission takes a decision swiftly and provides clarity by the end July at the very latest. Airports, coordinators and many other sectors would benefit from clarity in July on the schedules that will be flown in the Winter season, including travel agents and the wider tourism industry.

We are looking forward to your positive reply and we hope that you can act quickly to provide the entire aviation sector, businesses and passengers with much needed clarity for the next months.

Please note that we will send a similar letter to

Yours sincerely,

BAR|N

KLM