

DON'T CAUSE A SHUTDOWN IN EUROPE, MR PRESIDENT

Open letter from Members of the European Parliament to
Mr Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission



Initiated by:
Franck Proust MEP

Dear Mr President,

As Members of the European Parliament, we want to express our serious concerns regarding the draft *Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines*, recently published by the European Commission.

With these new proposals, you intend to significantly restrict the ability of national, regional and local authorities to finance regional airports – all in the name of fair competition and fiscal discipline. In particular, the draft Guidelines provide that operating aid will be completely phased out for regional airports with over 200,000 passengers per year, after a 10 year transitional period.

We understand your wider agenda for State aid reform. We appreciate the need to review the existing aviation guidelines to reflect market developments. However, we believe that banning operating aid for small regional airports will destroy wide tracts of positive economic activity and actually increase social exclusion in what is fast becoming a divided EU.

Regional airports are not just commercial undertakings, Mr President. These airports provide an affordable, Trans-European connectivity that is today essential to attracting investment, fostering economic regeneration, retaining population and offering opportunities to young people in their homeland. For our local communities, these airports are strategic assets enabling growth and job creation – and thus strongly contributing to fiscal revenues. Therefore, these airports are essential public infrastructure and must be treated as such.

For this reason, we urge you to reconsider the proposed Guidelines, in particular so as to allow operating aid to regional airports with less than 1 million passengers, beyond the 10 year transitional period. This kind of aid should be allowed in a proportionate and incentivising way – as advocated by the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and ACI EUROPE (Airports Council International). We also recommend you re-evaluate the criteria for freight, which are not based on serious analysis.

Over half of the EU's airports welcome less than 1 million passengers. If we don't act now, it will threaten the existence of many regional airports, with harsh consequences for local communities and Regions. This would also be at odds with the EU's Growth & Jobs agenda, as well as being in blatant opposition to the EU's investment in the economic development of regions surrounding small airports via structural funds.

The necessary changes are minimal, but they are essential if the Guidelines are to balance the wider economic and social objectives against the pure orthodoxy of competition. With the right policy and regulatory approach, regional airports can do more to connect their Regions, serve their communities and ultimately Europe's citizens and businesses.

Co-signed by:

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