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Open letter from European Transport Commissioner Adina Vălean on standardised weights and dimensions for hand luggage

On 29 November 2023, the Commission adopted a new Passenger Mobility Package designed to improve the experience of passengers and travellers. These proposals build on existing rules, which I am proud to say already give passengers travelling in, to and from Europe some of the strongest protections worldwide. Nevertheless, as I said when presenting this package: “that does not mean we cannot do even better”.

One recurrent irritant faced by passengers relates to the proliferation of different airline rules and practices for carry-on luggage. Indeed, the many differences with regard to the weights and dimensions of carry-on – and in some instances also checked-in – luggage permitted by different airlines and for different classes of tickets may be challenging for travellers who fly with different airlines, take connecting flights with different carriers or need to change airlines for unforeseen or practical reasons. These issues have namely been highlighted in a recent resolution adopted by the European Parliament on standardised dimensions for carry-on luggage.

The Commission proposal of 2013 to amend Regulation (EU) No 261/2004 already addresses some of these concerns, notably by requiring air carriers to clearly inform passengers of the baggage allowance applicable to their respective bookings. This comes in addition to the Air Services Regulation, which contains rules designed to ensure that passengers have clear information and can easily compare the price of air tickets, including any ancillary services, such as luggage, among many other options.

While I fully stand by the freedom for air carriers to set air fares, and acknowledge the benefits enabled by the unbundling of certain services – not least allowing airlines to offer genuinely lower prices to customers who do not want to use those supplementary services – the ongoing review of the Air Services Regulation will nonetheless assess the existing transparency measures to see whether further improvements can be made.

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The new passenger rights proposal, presented on 29 November, calls on air carriers to join forces with other relevant stakeholders to establish **common industry standards on the weights and dimensions of hand luggage** with a view to limiting the number of different practices and enhancing the passenger travel experience across the EU passenger air services market.

Even though there are clearly situations where those differences are still needed, due to the variety of existing aircraft specifications, making a mandatory ‘one-size-fits all’ impossible at this stage, I am convinced that there is ample room for simplification and further convergence.

I therefore hereby use this opportunity to request the aviation industry as a whole and all relevant stakeholders for their full engagement in this standardisation process.

Air carriers should then report on their adherence to those standards as part of their service quality management systems. The publication of implementation reports by carriers on their quality standards should allow users to compare and make informed choices, encourage competition based on the quality of services, and facilitate uniform monitoring and enforcement by the national enforcement bodies.

In addition, I also call on the sector to take extra care to clearly inform passengers about the luggage allowance included as standard in all fare classes; and to be transparent about the additional fees applicable to any luggage which goes beyond the allowance included in each of the respective fare classes. It would be equally important to clearly inform passengers in advance if aircraft size and/or configuration means that it may not be possible for all passengers to bring into the cabin the full allowance of carry-on luggage.

In order to take stock of the progress of the sector’s deliberations on the two above-mentioned issues, I will convene a stakeholder workshop on the matter in the first half of 2024.

I strongly believe that a sector-wide solution can be found and that it would further enhance the travel experience for passengers. If no solution were to be found among stakeholders, the Commission may need to assess carefully possible regulatory options.

Yours sincerely,

Adina VĂLEAN

