



Press release

AER (Assembly of European Regions) questions political sense of expected ruling of the European Commission on Ryanair

Strasbourg, January 29, 2004

Next week's expected ruling of the European Commission on illegally received state subsidies of Ryanair has raised deep concern by regional authorities throughout Europe.

Mr. Onno Hoes, member of the Executive of the region of Noord-Brabant and Coordinator of AER's working group on regional aviation regards the verdict of the European Commission as a direct threat to the existence of regional airports:

"Not only the future of Ryanair, of no –frill airlines and low-cost carriers is at stake. The European Commission has to be aware that there is a regional and interregional dimension.

So far the European Commission has never entered into a discussion with the regions or the AER as our representative organisation. The public will be astonished, when they see how many regions, in particular in the periphery and in rural areas of Europe, are profiting from the concept of low cost-cost carriers by joining underused regional airports and providing not expensive travel.

The decision of the Commission could lead again to the abandonment of regional airports with an enormous impact on our regional development plans, e.g. for the development of small business and tourism. It could threaten also the cohesion of Europe looking at the fact that the present and the new routes planned by Ryanair and other carriers are direct connections between regions and not only between capitals and industrial centres."

The AER argues that the development of the last years with low-cost carriers using small regional airports has allowed in particular small and medium enterprises to get access to the international market at reasonable costs. This makes them competitive in the market.

Onno Hoes referred to huge public investments in the infrastructure of the regions, the incentives provided by the regions for setting up new enterprises and the effects on local employment.

The AER expresses the fear, that the European Commission by insisting on strict application of competition regulations will seriously infringe the ability of the regions to organize their transport services.

The regions concerned have called for an urgent meeting to be coordinated by the AER in order to respond to the challenging ruling and to define a long-term policy strategy in this field.

The attached non-exhaustive list shows only those regions that are currently served by Ryanair or which Ryanair has already announced to serve.

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