OPINION

of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

for the Committee on Transport and Tourism

on an aviation strategy for Europe
(2016/2062(INI))

Rapporteur: Anneleen Van Bossuyt
SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection calls on the Committee on Transport and Tourism, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Welcomes the inclusion of a specific section on consumers in the Commission’s Aviation Strategy; notes that for consumers booking travel many of the applicable rights are still based on horizontal consumer protection legislation; considers, therefore, that the ‘Fitness Check’ on the consumer acquis should take that into account;

2. Recognises the importance of the aviation sector as an engine for growth, employment and new business opportunities for the European economy, and its crucial role in the mobility of goods, people and services in the internal market;

3. Recognises the importance of the aviation sector in the European aeronautics industry, a world leader in the production of civil aircraft that is responsible for more than 500 000 jobs in the EU;

4. Recognises the benefits derived from the liberalisation of air transport in the EU and the creation of the single market for air passenger services;

5. Regrets the fragmentation of European Union airspace, the cost of which is put at EUR 5 billion by the Commission and which, in particular, results in delays for passengers;

6. Regrets the fact that agreement has still not been reached within the Council on the Passenger Rights Regulation (revision of Regulation (EC) No 261/2004), on which Parliament submitted its report in April 2014; welcomes the Commission’s decision to make use of interpretative guidelines for present rules, but believes that the adoption of the revised Regulation 261/2004 is necessary to provide legal certainty for consumers and the aviation industry and address loopholes in the current legislation; stresses that strengthened consumer rights should be one of the main objectives of the aviation strategy and any reform of aviation rules;

7. Recalls the ‘sweep’ of travel service websites across the Union undertaken by the Commission and national enforcement bodies in 2013; notes that this ‘sweep’ uncovered significant problems with more than two-thirds of websites checked, with difficulties relating to: a failure to provide mandatory contact information; a lack of instructions on how to submit a complaint; uncertainty as to whether the complaint has been received or failure to reply; price supplements such as baggage fees and insurance, or cancellation and amended booking policies not appearing on an ‘opt-in’ basis; and total prices not being displayed up-front;

8. Calls on the Commission, therefore, to undertake further research on the evolution of the digital travel marketplace with a view to identifying policies to ensure a level playing field for travel companies and protecting consumers by providing for transparency and neutrality when they search for, plan and book travel products and services;

9. Acknowledges the progress that was made following the ‘sweep’, whereby 191 websites
were brought up to date within twelve months and other websites are subject to ongoing proceedings;

10. Highlights that the public consultation undertaken in advance of the Aviation Strategy indicates that consumers still face challenges when booking air travel or checking in online; calls on the Commission to report more fully on the progress made to bring travel websites into compliance with EU law, and its future plans for enforcement in this area, as regards both online and offline air ticket sales;

11. Calls on the Commission to step up checks on airlines in general and low-cost airlines in particular to ensure that they are complying with EU law on passenger rights and aviation safety;

12. Underlines the importance of ensuring that travel websites and applications respect EU law, in particular EU law on consumer rights, as in 2015 travel and holiday accommodation bookings accounted for 52% of all purchases made online, and consumer confidence in the sector and increased trust in the online environment are vital for the development of SMEs in the tourism industry; takes the view that consumers using sites must be correctly informed and not misled, and that companies need to take the necessary steps to protect consumers and hosts with regard to safety and security;

13. Points to the importance of protecting and enforcing, both online and offline, the rights of travel-booking and travelling consumers, including people with a disability or with reduced mobility, as regards accessibility, assistance and access to information;

14. Welcomes the final agreement and adoption of the Package Travel Directive; considers that the new rules will present significant benefits to consumers looking to purchase travel and related services in this way;

15. Reiterates its commitment to high air and airport safety and security standards; welcomes consideration of the one-stop security approach and the Commission’s intention to promote the adoption of this approach with key trading partners; supports, furthermore, the Commission’s intention to maintain those high standards while alleviating the burden of security checks by making use of new technologies;

16. Welcomes the notable increase in airport connectivity in the EU over the last 10 years; regrets the fact that some regions are still poorly served and that consumers in less-connected cities, regions and countries are therefore at a competitive disadvantage compared with those connected via major hubs; takes the view that particular attention should be given in the Aviation Strategy to less well connected regions and smaller airports, especially in the outermost and less populated regions, and that due account should be taken of the conclusions of the European Court of Auditors in this area; stresses the need to review the Airport Charges Directive, and urges the Commission to assess the negative impact of current aviation charges;

17. Calls on the Commission to assess the fairness of practices whereby consumers are faced with significant charges for baggage fees or ticketing services where these have not been booked prior to the consumer checking-in or arriving at the departure gate;

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1 ‘EU-funded airport infrastructures: poor value for money’ European Court of Auditors (21/2014)
18. Welcomes the Commission’s ambition to strengthen the regulatory responsibility of the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA); stresses that safety and security considerations must be at the core of any efforts to enhance the performance and efficiency of the Single European Aviation Market, in order to ensure the continued trust of consumers and the competitiveness of the EU’s aviation sector globally; underlines the need for effective, proportionate and dissuasive penalties to ensure a culture of compliance and high safety and security standards across the EU aviation sector;

19. Recalls that consumers must always have a route available to them for submitting complaints to traders and claiming refunds; believes this route should be available in a manner which does not dissuade consumers from exercising their rights and should be clearly signposted to consumers; calls on the Commission to work closely with national enforcement bodies in order to ensure that traders meet these requirements;

20. Considers, while recognising the potential of the rapidly expanding use of drones, that passenger safety and security constitutes a priority, and urges the Commission, therefore, to put in place an adequate framework to ensure the safe use of drones within the EU;

21. Requests that the Commission provide further information on the measures it plans to take with regard to price comparison websites in the area of aviation travel, which can be detrimental to consumers if presented in an unfair manner that grants preferential treatment on the basis of commercial arrangements;

22. Highlights the need for air agents and operators to promote the 112 European emergency number on their websites and e-tickets;

23. Highlights the importance of maintaining high standards and a coordinated approach among Member States in areas related to the aviation sector, such as tourism, employment, consumer policy and the environment, including with regard to noise reduction and air quality.
## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date adopted</th>
<th>14.7.2016</th>
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| Result of final vote | +: 31  
 | | -: 0  
 | | 0: 2  |
| Substitutes present for the final vote | Jan Philipp Albrecht, Pascal Arimont, Kaja Kallas, Julia Reda, Ulrike Trebesius, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Kerstin Westphal |
| Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote | Gesine Meissner, Lieve Wierinck |