

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3378/08
by Marcello Vernola (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Macedonian air embargo

Since 1994, the company Macedonian Airlines (MAT), which has its headquarters in Skopje, has been operating scheduled services to numerous EU airports. It uses the acronym MAK, which was formulated by the ICAO to identify the Republic of Macedonia.

Since 2004, the Greek authorities (civil aviation and Ministry for Transport and Telecommunications) have been preventing MAT from operating flights to Greek airports. This situation was brought to the notice of the Commission back in 2006, when the latter pointed out that, under the terms of the ECAA Agreement (European Common Aviation Area), MAT was entitled to operate services of any kind (scheduled or otherwise) to any airports within European territory. The Republic of Macedonia joined the ECAA on 28 March 2007 (the process of ratification by signatory states is still under way).

Nevertheless, the latest in a long series of requests by MAT to operate charter flights to Corfu in the summer (June-August 2008) was turned down in April by the Greek aviation authorities and the Ministry for Transport and Telecommunications, on the unacceptable grounds that no authorisation can be granted under the name 'MAT - Macedonian Airlines'.

This embargo is damaging passenger and freight transport not only to and from Greece, but also - because no stopovers can be made in Athens - throughout the EU.

Given that the question of the name of the so-called FYROM must be resolved bilaterally, does the Commission not think that the obstructionist stance adopted by Greece (which is nevertheless the leading foreign investor in Macedonia) represents a breach of the principle of good neighbourliness and free movement laid down in the EU-Macedonia Stability and Partnership Agreement and included in the Copenhagen criteria?

What measures can the Commission suggest to promote positive economic relations between the two states?