

AEI Calls on EU to Improve Air Safety Transparency

Once again events reported in the United States have clearly highlighted the inadequacies of the European Union Transport Department's (DG TREN) oversight of air safety within Europe. A USA Today analysis of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) data in the United States has shown that 65,000 commercial passenger flights took place between 2003 and 2009 in an un-airworthy condition. In addition, the FAA imposed fines against 25 US airlines totalling US\$28.2 million. These figures relate only to those events that the FAA uncovered and are nothing more than the tip of the iceberg.

The European Commission, however, continues to protect the airlines which are under its control by consistently refusing to release the relevant safety data. It is interesting that just as the consultation period has closed on European Commission proposals to introduce fines for non-compliance with air safety regulations in order to better align with the United States, there remains no mention of placing the information in the public domain.

One case cited in the report¹ mentions an aircraft operated by American Eagle. The aircraft was involved in a major incident, in which the flight controls jammed shortly after takeoff. The FAA criticized American Eagle, stating that it had "prior knowledge of an aircraft vibration, yet continued to operate the aircraft until actual rudder control failure." The FAA went on to say that American Eagle "failed to employ competent personnel to ensure the highest degree of safety in its operations whilst flying the plane in an un-airworthy condition on 20 further flights with a vibration. This was careless and endangered the life or property of another." The airline was fined US\$600,000 (US\$30,000 per flight).

In Europe we are aware of one airline having flown an aircraft a further 505 times before the aircraft vibration was finally eliminated. The fine under FAA rules would have been \$15,150,000 yet in Europe, the airline remains unpunished. AEI has repeatedly warned of the increasing amount of non-compliance with air safety regulations and supplied evidence to regulators, but to no avail. The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) remains a paper tiger due to a lack of enforcement powers whilst the European Commission consistently fails to take effective action against incompetent National Aviation Authorities.

The sad fact remains that whistleblowers risk losing their jobs whilst those airlines performing flights with un-airworthy aircraft continue to cheat both the fare-paying passenger and punishment. The situation is fundamentally wrong, particularly if the European Commission is genuine in its claim that safety is paramount.

AEI believes that safety is not paramount as far as the EU is concerned, but rather that it is the business model that comes above all else. This situation must change before the next preventable accident occurs and one method of achieving this is transparency. Like the American system, European citizens have a right to know how European airlines are really performing.

Hoofddorp 10.02.2010

¹ FAA fines show extent of airline problems USA Today 2 Feb 2010