

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-000781/25
to the Commission
Maria Grapini (S&D)
(20 February 2025)**

Subject: Flight tickets

The complaint brought many travel agencies belonging to ECTAA, the European association representing travel agencies, travel management companies and tour operators — totalling around 80 000 European companies, of which over 95% are SMEs — shows that in recent years airlines have adopted business practices which place travel agencies at a disadvantage and discourage consumers from purchasing tickets through them. This situation is considered to affect fair competition in the market by limiting consumers' right to fair choice and favouring direct sales through the airlines' own channels, thus reducing the protection afforded to passengers.

One example of dubious business practices followed by airlines is that some do not give agencies access to all the tariffs available on their own websites and require passengers to check-in exclusively via their apps, limiting the possibilities for agencies to provide assistance to passengers.

Some airlines also charge additional fees for tickets purchased through GDS (global distribution systems).

Tourism is an important economic activity which makes a significant contribution to EU GDP and job creation. I therefore believe that regulations in this area should be clear and guarantee maximum protection for passengers.

How can the complaints brought by travel agencies be resolved to ensure that passengers receive reliable and high-quality services?

Submitted: 20.2.2025

**Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas on behalf of the European Commission
(3 June 2025)**

Decades of liberalisation of the air services market ⁽¹⁾ and regulation of air ticket distribution ⁽²⁾ have led to a mature distribution market.

The Air Services Regulation provides for pricing freedom of air carriers and the Booking.com ⁽³⁾ case law has underlined the right of businesses to set differentiated prices across different channels.

The widespread presence of flight offers in different channels is an indicator of competition. In this context, while some airlines may opt for particular intermediaries, other airlines may opt to disintermediate some of their tickets. This is a usual commercial practice seen in many competitive markets.

Limiting airline freedom to deal with intermediaries of their choice and negotiate distribution contracts could disrupt the balance between airlines and intermediaries and may undermine competition between airlines.

Consumer protection and passenger rights apply equally to all flight-only ticket sales, irrespective of the channel. There are also specific protections for package travel ⁽⁴⁾.

In 2023, the Commission proposed that intermediaries, where they acquire a ticket on behalf of a passenger, shall provide the contact details of the passenger to the air carrier, so that the air carrier can comply with certain obligations it has under Union law, such as re-routing, information and provision of care ⁽⁵⁾.

Furthermore, the Commission plans to adopt a proposal on Multimodal Digital Mobility Services (MDMS) in 2025, to achieve seamless multimodal passenger transport.

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EC) No 1008/2008 (Air Services Regulation) on common rules for the operation of air services in the Community, OJ L 293, 31.10.2008, p. 3-20.

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EC) No 80/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 January 2009 on a Code of Conduct for computerised reservation systems, OJ L 35, 4.2.2009, p. 47-55.

⁽³⁾ European Court of Justice, Case Booking.com and Booking.com (Deutschland), C-264/23, paras. 61 and 62 'so far as concerns wide parity clauses, which prohibit partner hoteliers referenced on the reservation platform from offering, on their own sales channels or on sales channels operated by third parties, rooms at a lower price than that offered on that platform, they do not appear to be objectively necessary for the main operation of providing online hotel reservation services or proportionate to the objective pursued by it. After all, there is no intrinsic link between the continued existence of the main activity of the hotel reservation platform and the imposition of such clauses, which clearly produce appreciable restrictive effects'.

⁽⁴⁾ Directive (EU) 2015/2302 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2015 on package travel and linked travel arrangements, OJ L 326, 11.12.2015, p. 1-33.

⁽⁵⁾ Please see COM(2023) 753 final, Art. 14a, and COM(2023) 752 final, Art. 5.

The initiative aims to set out principles to facilitate cooperation between transport operators and intermediaries and to improve the availability of flight tickets in multimodal platforms.
