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EUROPE MATTERS: APRIL 2010 E-NEWSLETTER

Hello and welcome to the April edition of my e-newsletter. Please feel free to pass this onto family, friends and colleagues.

Thank you for your continued support,

Catherine

Air Passenger Rights

The plume of ash following the eruption of the Eyjafjallajokull volcano in Iceland has brought chaos to thousands upon thousands of travellers throughout Europe.

The first responsibility of the Government was the safety of all passengers, the airline crews and the general public. Scientists and the meteorological office had a lot of work to do: they had to constantly keep abreast of what was happening to the volcano, orchestrate test flights and to assess how much ash was, and is, in the environment. Safety and security remained the number one priority. As our Prime Minister said, the Government would have never been forgiven if planes had been allowed to fly when there was a serious risk to the lives of thousands upon thousands of people.

Even in the midst of chaos and crisis, it is vital that all EU citizens are aware that they are entitled to some of the toughest passenger rights in the world. In light of the unprecedented shut down of large sections of European airspace, millions of travellers have been asking the question: **what are my passenger rights?**

This edition of my newsletter focuses on EU passenger rights and what to do if you believe that airlines are not upholding your rights.

The answers are straight forward:

1. You have the right to either reimbursement or re-routing;
2. You have the right to information - there is an obligation for airlines to inform you about rights and flight schedules;
3. You have the right to care- that means food, drinks, accommodation as appropriate.

However, air passengers are entitled to all usual rights, except the additional financial compensation that would apply in more normal circumstances (extra money to compensate for your inconvenience).

Frequently Asked Questions:

If my flight is cancelled, does the airline offer me the choice between re-routing or reimbursing?

YES – as the consumer it is your legal right to choose between re-routing or re-imburement.

However, if it very important to know that if you chose for a full re-imburement, then you forfeit others rights that you would have been entitled to. Therefore, the airline is under no legal obligation to provide you with accommodation, food or water.

If I choose re-imburement, do I get the full price back that I paid for the ticket – including taxes and other charges?

YES – the airline must re-imburse you in the full.

If I choose re-routing, what will the airline provide?

The airline can re-route you through other modes of transport, such as rail or bus. The airlines also have a duty of care to protect and provide for you – they should give you reasonable meals, water and accommodation if necessary.

What if an airline tells me that I am not entitled to these rights under “exceptional circumstances”.

Under EU law your passenger rights still apply. The only part that does not apply is additional finance – compensation for your inconvenience.

What if the airline refuses to accept this?

COMPLAIN. If the airline refuses to uphold your passenger rights, then you must contact your national enforcement body.

The address for the enforcement body in the UK is:

Civil Aviation Authority
CAA House
45-59 Kingsway
UK - LONDON WC2B 6TE
Tel. : +44 20 7379 7311
Fax : +44 20 7944 2190

How can the EU Package Travel Directive protect consumers who are stranded because of the cancelled flights?

If the cancelled flight has been purchased as part of a package holiday, consumers have more extended rights, including the right to obtain a refund for the entire package (including e.g. the flight and the hotel) and assistance on the spot if they are stranded.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/citizen/my_holidays/index_en.htm

Katla

As you will be aware, there is growing concern that the Katla volcano, near Eyjafjallajokull, may blow in the near future. Each time Eyjafjallajokull has erupted in the past 2,000 years - in 920, in 1612 and between 1821 and 1823 - Katla has exploded within six months. If this happens then we may be faced with further chaos and disruption.

I have written to both President Barosso and Commissioner Dalli (Health and Consumer Policy) and raised the issue of some airlines refusing to adhere to EU laws and regulations during the period when airspace was closed for Eyjafjallajokull. It is vital that the Commission act to ensure that consumers rights are protected. I am acutely aware that many of my constituents save all year round for a trip away in the summer and can ill afford for the airlines to refuse them their EU rights.

If you would like to monitor and keep abreast of the volcanic activity in Iceland, particularly if you are planning a trip abroad soon, you can check out:

<http://www.iceland.org/info/news/features/nr/8236>

If you have any questions, or if you are unsure of any of the information given in this newsletter, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Furthermore, if you would like a copy of a booklet on EU rights please email me at cstihlermep2@btconnect.com

For more information on the air passenger rights, please refer to http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/citizen/my_holidays/index_en.htm.

Get in Touch!

If you would like more information on my work in Parliament, please contact me.
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