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Written by Igor Kostadinovski, Junior Consultant on 14 September 2017



On September 11, a debate took place on the EU Emissions Trading System at the European Parliament Plenary session in Strasbourg.

Rapporteur Julie Girling (ECR, UK) said that “aviation accounts for approximately 2.1% of global CO₂ emissions and that, in the EU, direct CO₂ emissions from aviation account for approximately 3% of the total. With the anticipated growth in air traffic, emissions in 2050 are expected to be seven to ten times higher than in 1990. This is according to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and their projections. Clearly such a growth necessitates a policy response. This Parliament has taken the view that it is necessary to reduce the carbon impact of the growth in air travel. We all know the history of how we arrived where we are with ‘stop the clock’, so I do not intend to expand on that, but I do want to emphasise Parliament’s commitment to working with ICAO to find a mutually acceptable position.” Please find the full speech by following this link.

Miguel Arias Cañete, Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy, addressed the European

Parliament by saying: “Mr President, it is a pleasure to be here today and to take part in your deliberations on the proposal on the European Union emissions trading system for aviation. I appreciate the hard work of the rapporteur Ms Girling on this proposal and would like to thank her for her efforts. I would also like to thank the shadow rapporteurs for their valuable contributions and their support for a swift and a smooth process.” Please find the full speech by following this link.

Werner Langen (EPP, DE), rapporteur for the opinion of the ITRE Committee, said that, after examining the proposal, they broadly support the Commission’s approach. He underlined that it is important not to have competitive distortion to the detriment of European aviation. Hence, he argued in favour of an international agreement. However, he added, if negotiations do not progress sufficiently by 2020, it would be important to ensure that they do not just have delegated act of the Commission, but that the Parliament should be fully involved and in position to put forward its proposal. In any case, he explained that ITRE’s position is clear as their report has been adopted with 51 votes in favour, just 5 against and no abstentions, that they want to see progress for European aviation and that they need to keep up the pressure on international talks.

Jacqueline Foster (ECR, UK), rapporteur for the opinion of the TRAN Committee, said that: “... first I would like to thank my shadow rapporteurs on the Transport Committee and other Members who have been extremely supportive of our position. The Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN) has supported for many years a single, global emissions scheme. It is imperative, Commissioner, that the EU allows time for the ground-breaking International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) negotiation discussions to be concluded. As we know, constructive talks are already underway and it is vital that countries such as the US, China, India and others are included as they are major players in this field.” Please find the full speech by following this link.

Bogusław Liberadzki (S&D, PL) then gave the floor to the representatives of the political groups.

Peter Liese (EPP, DE) said that they have been talking about climate change again in the past few days due to the current natural disasters. He said that the proportion of the aviation emissions has been growing, which is worrying. Having in mind the talks about CORSIA, he acknowledged that it is not yet up to mark. However, he warned against “jumping the gun” as it might cause putting an end to it completely and not giving it a chance to mature. He thanked the rapporteur for a balanced report, and focused on the amendment 36 that they have tabled, representing a compromise between TRAN and ENVI Committees’ positions and, to that extent, called for supporting it. He added that, even though they do not wish a “hard Brexit” but rather that the UK stays within the Single Market and the ETS, they do foresee such scenario.

Seb Dance (S&D, UK), shadow rapporteur for the S&D group, thanked the rapporteur for a balanced report, reflecting the consensus on an issue as serious as this. He said that, while many sectors are reducing their emissions, this is not the case in the aviation sector. He explained that the global-based market solution makes sense on paper and that the ICAO is very good at handling this process, but that they still need the added pressure. He continued by saying that they cannot just sit back and hope for the best and he believes that the carbon neutral growth proposed from 2020 will be sufficient. He clarified that this report does give the Commission the criteria to judge the success or otherwise of ICAO’s process and sends a strong signal that they do not want to undermine Parliament’s existing stance on Phase 4 of the Emissions Trading System. In conclusion, he extended his group’s supports for this proposal and expressed hope that Parliament’s vote will reflect the strong consensus achieved.

Mark Demesmaeker (ECR, BE) said that, in order to reach the Paris Agreement goals, all sectors must do their bit, including aviation. As regards to the derogation, he said they are unhappy, as all derogations are harmful for climate and economy. However, in this case, he explained that there are

two key developments justifying the extension, namely: the fact that ICAO reached an agreement in October 2016 and that they need to give it a chance and, secondly, that the Parliament confirmed this will definitely be the very last extension.

Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy, (ALDE, NL), shadow rapporteur for the ALDE group, asked how do they judge the ICAO decision to tackle the problem of climate change? Is it a strong and decisive step of the aviation sector to freeze its emissions globally at 2020 levels and compensate for all additional emissions, or rather a cunning attempt by the aviation industry to buy more time and to accommodate unlimited growth in the future? In his opinion, it is neither of the two. He saw it as a promising step forward but, at this stage, a limited one, as it will be implemented in the coming years on a voluntary basis. In addition, he said that the rules on the global trading registry, criteria for offsets and monitoring of emissions still have to be agreed and implemented by participating countries. Hence, he underlined that the political pressure will be greatly needed. He extended a strong support for MEP Girling's report and added that they badly need a time limit on the derogation in order to make the ICAO process a success.

Merja Kyllönen (GUE/NGL, FI), shadow rapporteur for the GUE/NGL group, said it is important that they come up with an overall solution to cut emissions in the aviation sector. MEP Kyllönen explained that she took part in negotiations and that, although they have managed to overcome some of the challenges, the process is being lobbied, and blocked, from different sides and that this has prevented them from making further progress. She concluded by saying that an international offsetting system should be as broad as possible, non-discriminatory and effective.

Bas Eickhout (GREENS/EFA, NL), shadow rapporteur for the GREENS/EFA group, recalled that, already back in 2008, the EU promised, with unanimous support from the Council, to get aviation to fall within the scope of the Emissions Trading System (ETS) by 2012. Then, that they were promised by ICAO that there would be a global deal in 2016. Indeed, that global deal is there, but they have not seen anything yet on how it will work. He underlined that carbon-neutral growth is far from being enough for implementation of Paris Agreement since it is, in his view, nonsensical to say that aviation is not falling within the scope of the Agreement. He reiterated that it is finally time for ICAO to live up to its promises and for aviation to pay for its emissions, like all the other sectors.

Miriam Dalli (S&D) said that the emission reduction efforts that different EU industries make should be brought in line and also that the aviation sector has to do its share. She added that a sound comparison of the overall ambition of CORSIA with the ETS is required and that this can only be done against definite and agreed criteria, thus ensuring and determining an adequate scope for 2019. She also made an appeal for more transparency. In conclusion, she said that she understands that the airline industry, like many other industries, operates on thin margins and obviously needs to stay on top of any financial risk, however they need to act and invest now to be prepared for the upcoming challenges.

Gesine Meissner (ALDE, DE) said that they have triggered a global debate but what needs to be understood is that Russia voted against it and that even Obama opposed some of their initiatives. Hence, the global system could be in jeopardy if they would apply too much pressure.

Kateřina Konečná (GUE/NGL, CZ) said that reducing emissions from air-traffic is one of the greatest challenges. She criticised the EU for not paying enough attention when forging the climate strategy and effectively cherry-picked what issues they wanted to solve and which they did not. She concluded by saying that air sector needs to be part of the system.

Isabella De Monte (S&D, IT) urged to approve this file quickly in order to provide legal clarity and certainty to the operators in the sector. She also argued in favour of bringing in the Single European

Sky to meet the Paris Agreement goals, which she regarded as crucial in order to avoid as fragmentation of the airspace.

Gilles Pargneaux (S&D, FR) stated that there needs to be a global scheme and regretted the fact that CORSIA is not going to be mandatory until 2027. Hence, he argued in favour of extending the “stopping of the clock” until 2020.

Damiano Zoffoli (S&D, IT) argued in favour of more transparency and commended the Rapporteur’s measures calling for it. In addition, he urged the Commission to provide research into photovoltaic energy in the aviation sector.

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