

Norwegian Air: Parliament gets involved

Pressure surrounding this case may get the better of the business model developed by the airline

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Norwegian Air International, © Flickr/RHLImages

Pressure has not slacked on Norwegian Air International (NAI), the Irish subsidiary of Norwegian Air Shuttle, which is trying to obtain the American license authorising it to operate flights between the United Kingdom and the United States. Now the European Parliament is going on the offensive. In a letter seen by *Europolitics*, Michael Cramer (Greens-EFA, Germany), chair of the Committee on Transport (TRAN), and Marita Ulvskog (S&D, Sweden), who heads the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), ask the Commission for details on the airline's business model.

NAI employs its staff through a Singapore-based company under Thai contracts. "If confirmed, this raises questions about the respect of social and labour standards as well as fair competition among airlines in the European and global context," state the two MEPs in the letter addressed to Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc and Employment and Social Affairs Commissioner Marianne Thyssen. Parliament may also hold a hearing soon on the matter and draft an own-initiative report on these atypical forms of employment in aviation.

The initiative comes amidst [heightened activity](#) related to this case in the last two months..

During the end-of-year holidays, Emmanuel Jahan, chair of the Civil Aviation Sectoral Social Dialogue, received a response to a letter he had sent to Bulc when taking up his duties in early November in which he denounced the 'Norwegian model'. Contacted by *Europolitics*, he said that he detects a "change of attitude" by the Commission. The executive confirms its opinion that NAI's parent company is perfectly entitled to set up a company in the EU to take advantage of the traffic rights opened with the United States under the Open Sky agreement. However, the commissioner also stresses the importance of social dialogue in this case and notes that airlines based in a member state "must comply with EU and national standards, in particular with the standards on working conditions". "Any business model must provide decent jobs," continues Bulc. She also states that it is important "to work together on these matters, including on the general issues of outsourcing and new forms of employment in aviation".

Will these developments help scuttle the business model originally developed by NAI? According to Jahan, the airline is in the process of changing the employment contracts of its pilots, originally based in Bangkok, to transfer them to London Gatwick, where they would effectively take up their service. These changes would mean they would pay social security contributions and taxes in the United Kingdom rather than Thailand. "We have won the first round," welcomes Jahan, although the case of cabin crew (flight attendants) is apparently not settled yet. Meanwhile, NAI has not yet abandoned the temporary employment company based in Singapore through which it hires staff.

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