



AL MANSOURI CALLS TO KEEP OPEN SKIES AHEAD OF EU POLICY TALKS

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The Minister of Economy last night called for the preservation of open skies as aviation industry leaders gathered for the opening day of the Dubai Airshow.

“For forty years, barriers and restrictions for airlines have come down. This is not the time to turn back,” said Sultan Al Mansouri. “The UAE is ready to join with the US and EU to help lead a new effort towards even greater liberalisation in international air transport.”

He made his remarks at an event on the sidelines of the air show hosted, which is by the US-UAE Business Council.

During his speech the minister stressed that the UAE would actively resist efforts to impose new government restrictions that would limit competition.

“UAE airlines and the UAE government have fully met all of the obligations and responsibilities under Open Skies agreements. And in the interests of global consumers and fair competition, the UAE government will oppose new efforts to restrict, limit or control air services.”

Regional carriers including Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways are facing competitive headwinds in Europe and North America as their rapid route expansion in the United States and Europe meets with opposition from local carriers who accuse them of benefiting from state support – a claim they vigorously deny.

The minister also highlighted commercial and trade ties with the US and noted that UAE airlines together represented the largest customer for Boeing aircraft.

“The expansion of Emirates and Etihad into the US, as into Europe, is a direct response to organic growth in demand from consumers in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. These are the world’s fastest-growing markets with rapidly expanding middle classes,” he said.

“Passengers from the immediate and greater region use the connectivity that UAE airlines provide to fly to Orlando to see Mickey Mouse, attend corporate conferences in Seattle and San Francisco, study at universities in Boston and Southern California, or receive medical treatment in Houston or Washington DC. This expanded two-way travel is exactly what US and UAE policymakers had in mind when they signed an Open Skies agreement in 1999. The view then, as now, was very clear – let passenger and cargo demand drive the market.”

While US carriers and their regional rivals have traded accusations for much of the past year, the focus is now switching to Europe, where politicians are working up a new aviation policy.

What that new aviation policy is likely to contain and how it might affect regional carriers is likely to be raised this week as the European transport commissioner Violeta Bulc arrives for talks with GCC ministers and airline executives.

09 NOVEMBER 2015

SOURCE: THE NATIONAL

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