

Dáil Motion re Air Service Agreements with Egypt and UAE

Select Committee on Transport Tourism and Sport

Wednesday 11 July 2018

Statement by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Shane Ross T.D.

Introduction

Firstly may I thank the Committee for facilitating the discussion of this item at short notice.

This Dáil Motion is to approve the terms of an Air Services Agreement between Ireland and the Arab Republic of Egypt and an Air Services Agreement between Ireland and the United Arab Emirates.

These two Agreements were negotiated and agreed at official level some years ago. However, as is normal for such international agreements constitutional procedures need to be followed by both sides in order to allow the Agreements to be formally signed and to enter into force.

In the case of Ireland these procedures involve both Government and Dáil approval. The Government approved both Agreements at its meeting on 12 June last.

The passing of the Dáil Motion will allow both Agreements to be signed at an opportune occasion in the future. The United Nations General Assembly often provides such an opportunity and may be suitable for these Agreements. It is due to open in New York on 18 September 2018. To avail of this opportunity the Government is seeking to have the Dáil Motion passed before the summer recess.

Background

The majority of international trade in goods and services is now governed by international trade and investment agreements under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) system. However, international air transport remains outside of the WTO system and instead is governed by a multitude of bilateral air services agreements negotiated between States within the framework of the 1944 Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation.

International aviation agreements generally follow a prescribed format and both of these Agreements are no different in that regard.

The main purpose of such Agreements is to provide for the reciprocal granting of air traffic rights to airlines from both countries to operate scheduled air services. The Agreements also cover a list of other standard provisions to facilitate air services, such as those relating to aviation safety and security and the facilitation of passengers and cargo.

Agreement with the United Arab Emirates

Ireland and the UAE have had close cooperative relations for many years. The text of the Ireland-UAE Air Services Agreement was agreed at official level back in 1995. This was updated by a new Agreement at a meeting in Dublin in December 2011.

Both sides agreed to apply these Agreements on an administrative basis, pending entry into force. The formal procedures on the Irish side have been delayed until now. However, both sides would now like the Agreement to be signed and ratified as soon as possible.

The vast majority of air services in and out of Ireland are now governed either by the EU Single Aviation Market or by EU aviation agreements with third countries, such as the EU-US Open Skies Agreement. However, a number of important new

services do still operate under national level agreements, such as this Agreement with UAE.

In terms of the services operating, the Agreement with the UAE is now one of Ireland's most important national level Agreement. The two largest UAE airlines, Emirates and Etihad, operate successful double daily flights from Dublin to Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Both airlines have gradually increased capacity on these routes since they were first established. Etihad began services in 2007 and Emirates began services in 2012. Aer Lingus also operated Dublin-Dubai for a short period around 2006/2007.

Ireland has good trade, tourism and cultural relations with the UAE. The very good direct air services between the two countries is certainly a great facilitator of those relations. These relations will be further bolstered by the Taoiseach's recent announcement that Ireland will participate in EXPO 2020 in Dubai and the fact that Ireland will lift its visa requirement for UAE citizens wishing to visit Ireland with effect from 31 January 2018.

In addition to direct connectivity to the UAE, these air services also provide good one stop connectivity options to a range of destinations in Asia, Africa and Australasia.

I should also mention that the European Union is currently seeking to negotiate an EU Air Services Agreement with the UAE. Ireland is supportive of these efforts; but in the meantime it is important that our national level Agreement with the UAE is signed and comes into force.

Agreement with Egypt

The Air Services Agreement with Egypt was negotiated at official level at a meeting in Dublin in October 2014. Both sides would now like the Agreement to be formally signed as soon as possible. Egypt has made enquires on the matter at various meetings between Ireland and Egypt in recent years. The matter was discussed during a visit of an Oireachtas delegation to Egypt in January 2017, which included the Ceann Comhairle.

In January 2018, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney T.D. also travelled to Cairo as part of a wider trip to the Middle East.

There are no scheduled air services operating between Ireland and Egypt at present. Tourist charter services have operated in the past from Ireland to Egypt. No airline has any immediate plans to operate direct scheduled services between the two countries. However, this Agreement will facilitate future services with a view to enhancing connectivity between Ireland and Egypt.

Conclusion

Thank you once again to the Committee for its time.

I hope that after consideration by the Committee here today it will be possible for the Dáil Motion to be referred back to the full House so that it can be passed before the summer recess. This will allow both these important Agreements to be signed in the coming months.

ENDS