



What does Brexit mean for our industry?

Brussels, 1 February 2019

The airline catering industry respects the sovereign decision of the British electorate to leave the European Union. At the same time, its representative trade body, ACA, is concerned that Brexit in its current form could go against what airline catering stands for: the seamless flow of goods without disruption when travelling. For an industry that operates both on the ground and above the clouds, airline catering is on the frontline of the disruptions that could be caused by Brexit and airline caterers have good reasons to be worried.

Why? The UK is the largest aviation market in Europe with over 250 million passengers per year. One in four passengers in Europe takes off or lands at a British airport, so traffic between the UK and EU airports is of great significance to almost all EU airlines – and to us. Our members work at UK airports and serve UK airlines and often do this from different kitchen locations on the continent. The uninterrupted supply of goods between UK and EU borders is therefore essential to us and to every passenger's flight.

What can we expect? There are two possible scenarios. The first is that some sort of deal can be struck to preserve the status quo for the aviation sector. Needless to say, this is the option ACA and the whole industry is actively lobbying for. The second scenario is a more sombre one, where the UK exits the EU without a deal in place. A 'no deal' Brexit would result in the UK having to leave the common European aviation market. Furthermore, the UK would drop out of the various Open Skies agreements that the EU has negotiated with countries around the world, most notably the US. And EU-UK air traffic rights would have to be renegotiated, leading at best to a suboptimal outcome. The uncertainty is taking its toll.

A 'no-deal' Brexit would hit the airline catering industry particularly hard. The prospect of airport disruption and the grounding of flights would affect traffic between the EU and the UK. Any interruption or delay in the supply of meals due to new customs checks would leave airlines without any food or drinks to serve to its passengers. It therefore comes as no surprise that airline caterers have started stockpiling meals and snacks to see passengers through at least a few days of disruption at the UK border.

What can the airline catering industry do about this? Firstly, we need to keep up the pressure in order to safeguard our interests and make our voices heard over the coming weeks. We need to ensure that our response is not one of panic, but one that is uniform across the industry and strategically prepared for any possible outcome. On 29th March 2019, we want to be in a position that is thought-through and consolidated.

We therefore hope that a mutually beneficial agreement can be reached to preserve as much as possible of the status quo. The gastronomic experience above the clouds is at play.

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