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Position Paper on the EU-Qatar-CATA

Executive Summary

EurECCA calls on European Commission to suspend and terminate the EU–Qatar Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA) without delay. Presented as a liberalisation instrument, the agreement in fact represents a profound failure of EU trade, social, and transport policy. It entrenches structural unfair competition, facilitates social dumping, weakens aviation safety protections, and endangers high-quality aviation employment across the European Union.

The CATA grants Qatar Airways unrestricted access to the EU aviation market without requiring compliance with binding labour, social, or governance standards and requirements, equivalent to those imposed on European carriers. This imbalance is exacerbated by Qatar's continued non-ratification of some fundamental ILO conventions, the exposure of Qatar-linked corruption allegations within some EU institutions, and attempts by Qatar's Civil Aviation Authority to weaken flight safety by undermining existing regulations on fatigue and duty-time protections such as flight times limitations and rest requirements. Unlike EU carriers, which are fully subject to EU competition law ([Articles 101–109 TFEU](#)), state aid control, social legislation, and aviation safety regulation, Qatar Airways operates under a state-controlled economic model outside the reach of meaningful EU enforcement.

According EurECCA, in its current form, the agreement is not merely flawed. It is incompatible with EU law, EU values, and the Union's stated commitment to social protection and democratic accountability.



Qatari labour law and standards: Inadequate and undeserving

European cabin crew are protected by collective agreements, statutory social security systems, and enforceable labour rights derived from EU law and national constitutions. These protections reflect [the EU's legal obligation under Article 151 TFEU to promote improved working conditions and social dialogue](#).

By contrast, cabin crew employed by Qatar Airways are subject to employment regimes characterised by de facto prohibitions on trade union activity and collective bargaining: Foreign nationals are not allowed to join trade unions within Qatar under [Article 116 of the Qatari Labour Law](#). This is in unreconcilable contrast to [basic ILO conventions and fundamental instruments such as additional protocols](#), including [ILO Convention No. 87 \(Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, 1948\)](#) as well as [ILO Convention No. 98 \(Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, 1949\)](#). Additionally, Qatar has not yet ratified [ILO Convention No. 100 on equal remuneration](#), undermining the right to equal pay between the sexes.

The absence of these ratifications directly contradicts the CATA's references to "international labour standards" and renders such language hollow. An agreement that tolerates this disparity actively facilitates social dumping, standing in stark contrast with EU labour standards.

The expansion of Qatar Airways under the CATA has already contributed to the displacement of EU-based long-haul operations. Each lost route corresponds to the elimination of stable, unionized, high-skilled cabin crew jobs governed by European labour law. This outcome is a predictable consequence of exposing EU carriers to competition from an airline operating under labour conditions fundamentally incompatible with EU labour standards. The CATA thus undermines Europe's role as a high-quality aviation employment hub and contradicts the EU's obligation to promote sustainable employment.

Qatar Airways: A state-aided corporation competing with free enterprise

Qatar Airways benefits from full state ownership, preferential financing as well as capital injections. Financial relations between the State of Qatar, Doha Hamad International Airport and Qatar Airways remain opaque as its financial interrelations remain shielded from public scrutiny. Credible sources have repeatedly argued that [Qatar Airways is benefitting from undue financial subsidies](#). Such advantages would be incompatible with EU state aid law if exercised by a European carrier. Yet the CATA provides no enforceable mechanism to ensure transparency, effectively importing market distortion into the EU internal aviation market.



History of the CATA: Corruption allegations and democratic legitimacy

Recent corruption allegations involving Qatar-linked influence operations within some EU institutions sow doubt about serious deficiencies in the Union's safeguards against undue foreign interference. The former Director-General of DG MOVE of the European Commission, [was recently linked with receiving free business class flights as well as hotel accommodation paid for by third parties whilst the CATA agreement was negotiated](#). The findings of the internal European Commission investigation strike at the core of the integrity that must underpin all international negotiations carried out in the name of the European Union. An agreement granting unrestricted access to the EU aviation market cannot remain provisionally applied, when the negotiating conditions fail to meet the most basic standards of transparency and accountability.

In fact, continuing to apply the CATA under these conditions undermines the EU's democratic legitimacy and violates basic principles of good governance enshrined in [Article 2 TEU](#).

Attempts to undermine EU Aviation safety standards and requirements

Aviation safety is non-negotiable. Nevertheless, regulatory developments associated with international aviation cooperation have led to a dangerous erosion of EU fatigue protections, notably through the intent of Qatar's Civil Aviation Authority to redefine duty time to exclude onboard rest periods. This approach contradicts the intent of [Regulation \(EU\) No 965/2012](#) and EASA's fatigue risk management principles, which recognise that onboard rest does not eliminate cumulative fatigue and must be factored into duty time. It also represents a clear departure from the EU's precautionary approach to aviation safety and places commercial interests above passenger and crew safety.

EurECCA demands: Repeal the CATA with Qatar immediately!

In light of these systemic failures, EurECCA calls on European and national policymakers to take immediate action. The EU-Qatar Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement must be suspended and terminated. Outstanding national ratification processes must be rejected and the agreement terminated in accordance with its own provision for doing so mentioned in [Article 27](#).

Any future framework for engagement must be conditional upon binding and enforceable commitments, including full compliance with fundamental ILO conventions – specifically Conventions 87, 98, and 100. Full transparency of state financing with strict equivalence to EU state aid rules should of course be mandatory in order not to create unfair disadvantages of third-country carriers over European ones. It is absolutely crucial that there are clear-defined oversight measures that hold the power to sanction carriers not playing by the rules by banning them from flights into EU countries if they are in violation of basic rules.



In addition, complete alignment with EU aviation safety standards, including robust protections against cumulative fatigue, are a very necessary basis in order not to violate the [EU precautionary principle](#) and to guarantee aviation safety within the Union.

Explicit guarantees of trade union and collective bargaining rights for all employees regardless of nationality is not a nice-to-have, but a European matter of course and an absolute basis for any future negotiations. Air crews' representatives must be formally involved in the negotiation, implementation, and oversight of all air transport agreements.

Conclusion

The European Union publicly commits itself to a social Europe founded on enforceable labour rights, to high aviation safety standards, and to transparent, rules-based competition. Maintaining the EU–Qatar Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement in its current form directly contradicts these commitments. It conflicts with Articles 2 and 3 TEU, Article 151 TFEU as well as with EU competition and state aid law. Furthermore, there have been attempts by Qatar's CAA to undermine European safety standards by redefining crucial terms such as duty period in a way which would lead to increasing cumulative fatigue.

Trade and transport policy cannot be separated from social, safety, and democratic obligations and requirements. The CATA represents a deliberate decoupling of market access from responsibility. European aviation must not be sacrificed to regulatory arbitrage, political expediency, or commercially motivated dilution of labour and safety standards. The EU–Qatar Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement is not a neutral trade instrument – it is, in its current form, a vehicle for social dumping, market distortion, and regulatory erosion.

Suspension and termination of the agreement are not radical measures; they are the minimum necessary steps to defend air crews' rights, aviation safety, democratic integrity, and the credibility of the European Union itself. Only a comprehensive and independent reassessment can restore trust and ensure that the EU's commercial aviation framework rests on a foundation of integrity, fairness, and transparency.

EurECCA stands for fair skies and fair work

FLYING TOGETHER – PROTECTING EACH OTHER

About EurECCA: established in Brussels in 2014, the European Cabin Crew Association, EurECCA, represents, protects and develops the rights and needs of cabin crew all over Europe. It is composed of cabin crew unions from European Union Member States as well as accession and bordering states and represents some 50,000 cabin crew in Europe. EurECCA has no political connections. EurECCA's work is around Cabin Crew working conditions, wages, social protection and health and safety at work.