

Air France must trade slots for aid: Ryanair

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Europe's leading airline, Ryanair, urged Wednesday that Air France be forced to give up lucrative French airport slots if it receives more state aid.

Paris is in talks with European Union officials on the delicate issue of

state aid to the French flag carrier, which has already received substantial help from the government.

"Should yet another enormous and illegal state aid bailout occur, then effective remedies must be applied to ensure fair competition in the French market and to protect the interests of the French consumer / visitor," a Ryanair statement said.

The low-cost airline is based in Ireland and regularly underscores the amount of money being allocated to keep struggling rivals in the air.

In exchange for more aid, Air France must be prepared to give up "a substantial number of its take-off and landing slots at key French airports including Paris Charles De Gaulle, Paris Orly and Lyon," Ryanair argued.

French officials and the European Commission are currently discussing the terms of a further recapitalisation of the Air France-KLM group, which has suffered from the COVID-19 crisis.

EU officials have already indicated that in exchange for their approval, Air France should give up coveted slots at Orly, which is essentially saturated now.

Air France on the other hand has indicated that such a move posed a serious threat because it was counting on Orly operations to help it rebound from the crisis.

French officials want to avoid putting Air France, which was struggling even before the pandemic, at a competitive disadvantage.

Ryanair urged EU competition chief Margrethe Vestager to "stand firm in her discussions with the French government.

"Either Air France gets no state aid or proper remedies should be put in place to ensure a fair and level playing field for all airlines," it insisted.

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