



March 26, 2012

Mr. Jeffery A. Smisek
President and Chief Executive Officer
United Continental Holdings, Inc.
77 West Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Mr. Smisek:

On behalf of the worldwide membership of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) and American Hellenic Institute (AHI), we are writing to express disappointment with United Continental's November 2011 decision to terminate the seasonal non-stop flight from Newark (EWR) to Athens, Greece, which was a Continental route.

Greece as a Hub for Tourism, International Commerce

The Greek American community would like to think United Continental—as the world's largest airline—would be proud to offer its customers a direct flight to one of the leading countries of the world. Greece is not just any typical destination. Rather, Greece is the cradle of Western Civilization, providing its visitors with more than 2,500 years of rich culture and history. As one of the world's Top 20 premiere tourist destinations, Greece blends its rich culture and history with contemporary indulgences that tourists from all over the world flock to enjoy—the beautiful beaches, numerous islands, religious landmarks, lively social interactions and unparalleled great weather during the summer season.

Greece is also a major destination and port-of-call for the cruise industry. Piraeus is the third most frequently visited port on the Mediterranean cruise circuit.

- According to American Ambassador Daniel Smith, one American cruise line already has committed to home berth its vessels in Piraeus.

In addition, the recent lifting of cabotage restrictions will allow Greece to become a hub for European and international cruise lines. It is a strong signal that Greece is determined to become the number one tourism destination for cruises.

Furthermore, the speculation exists that the rationale behind United Continental's decision is concern about potential unrest due to Greece's economic crisis. If true, this rationale is baseless and there is no evidence to support it.

1. There have been no major air disruptions during the time of the crisis. Any occurrences that may resemble air disruptions are no different than ones in London and Paris.
2. Greece's strategic location makes it an ideal location to serve as a hub between the energy resources to Greece's east and the markets to its west.
3. Greece is a long-standing NATO ally and a member of the European Union since 1980.

Moreover, the European Union's approval of a second, 130 billion Euro loan to Greece on March 12, 2012 will help to re-energize investment, promote growth, and create jobs, providing a growing confidence throughout all sectors, including the tourism industry. As a result, tour operators and villa companies are offering appealing deals for tourists such as offering four nights for the price of three, according to a *BBC* report. Early booking prices for the 2012 summer can be at least 10 percent lower.¹ Also, according to a *CNN* interview with Chris Petsilas, director, U.S. office of the Greek National Tourism Organization, the Greek government has eliminated taxes for airlines and reduced hotel fees in the effort to attract tourists, especially Americans who spend three times more than the average traveler. Petsilas added that tourism is booming.²

We also note Athens International Airport continues to develop electronic services for passengers and visitors, making their travel as easy and convenient as possible. The airport's development of its free "ATH airport" app for users of popular smartphone devices provides real-time information on flights to and from Athens International Airport, as well as information for airlines, airport access, parking spaces and shops at the airport, regardless of the mobile platform of each user. The app is compatible for iPhone, Android, Windows Phone 7, and Symbian operating systems.

Greek Americans' Affluence & Desire to Travel

According to U.S. Census statistics, approximately two million Americans claim Greek ancestry. Greek Americans are second only to Jewish Americans in income and education, per capita, among ethnic communities in the United States. We assure you Greek Americans travel frequently and many visit Greece annually, if not on multiple occasions, during the course of a year. We, the undersigned, are two prime examples. In addition, all of United Continental's major hubs are located in large population centers of the Greek American community: New York metropolitan area, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, and Washington DC. It is our fervent opinion given the unique pulse we have on the Greek American community that Greek Americans will continue to travel to Greece in increased numbers in a show of support to the country.

Was United Continental's decision based on statistics that indicate not many Americans travel to Greece? If so, we contend the main reason for the possible low volume of travel to Greece is the lack of gateway cities that offer non-stop service to Athens. Currently, only Delta and U.S. Airways offer seasonal non-stop service from New York and Philadelphia, respectively. Therefore, the marketplace may believe Athens is a potentially difficult destination at which to arrive.

- United Continental Holdings can help correct this perception in the marketplace.

Our Recommendation

We note that Washington/Dulles (IAD) is a hub city for Star Alliance founding carrier United Continental Holdings. In fact for Europe, United Continental has eight daily non-stop flights to western Europe, including Amsterdam (AMS), Brussels (BRU), Frankfurt (FRA), London (LHR), Munich (MUC), Paris (CDG), Rome (FCO), and Zurich (ZRH). Of these eight cities, six are capital cities.

We ask, "Why not add a seventh European capital city to this list in Athens, Greece?"

¹ "Going Greek this summer," The Passport blog, *BBC*, March 14, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/travel/blog/20120314-going-greek-this-summer>.

² "With crisis at home, Greek-Americans to economic rescue?" by Jeff Stein, *CNN*, June 28, 2011, http://articles.cnn.com/2011-06-28/travel/us.greece.travel.economy_1.greek-economy-greek-americans-greece?s=PM:TRAVEL.

We contend an (IAD) to (ATH) direct route would be beneficial to United Continental Holdings. We base this contention on the reasons outlined in the content of this letter, including:

1. Greece as a Top 20 tourism destination,
2. Greece's commitment to lift cabotage restrictions and other measures to facilitate trade, commerce, and tourism,
3. a growing confidence in Greece thanks to a second EU loan and the tourism sector taking advantage through increased travel and lodging deals, and
4. a strong sense of commitment from the Greek American community to help Greece.

Therefore, we strongly recommend United Continental Holdings add a seasonal summer route from Washington/Dulles to Athens thus connecting two great capital cities of the world. United Continental's spoke and hub system should easily be able to accommodate this route. In addition, there is at least one major tour operator based in Washington that caters exclusively to Greece.

Mr. Smisek, according to the blog *Airline Route*, the cancelation of the Newark to Athens route may be a temporary one³. We certainly hope this is the case. However, in the interim, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this matter further and to offer our assistance to make a Washington/Dulles to Athens non-stop route a reality. Although we are not naïve to think we completely understand the decision-making process that goes into implementing an airline route, we are certain that this route would be a well-traveled one.

We appreciate the opportunity to bring this matter to your attention. Thank you for your kind consideration of our request. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



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CC: United States Ambassador to Greece Daniel B. Smith

³ <http://airlineroute.net/2011/11/11/ua-ewrath-s12update1/>