

ATHENS DECLARATION & CALL FOR ACTION

Effectively enforcing the Noise Balanced Approach as a Mandatory Process to Address Aircraft Noise

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The European airports & airlines represented by ACI EUROPE, A4E and ERA:

RECALLING:

- i) The **ICAO Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management** as the **globally agreed framework** to manage aircraft noise by locally undertaking a noise assessment, defining the noise problem, setting a noise objective and the application of four essential pillars: noise reduction at source, land-use planning, noise abatement operational procedures, and, only as a last resort, operating restrictions;
- ii) **EU Regulation 598/2014**, which implements the ICAO Balanced Approach into EU law and mandates its systematic application by EU countries when addressing aircraft noise problems;
- iii) The **critical role of air connectivity** in driving territorial cohesion, economic growth, economic competitiveness and global positioning, as reaffirmed in the 2024 **Draghi Report: “The Future of Europe and Competitiveness”**¹, and in the **SEO Amsterdam Economics Study: “The Economic and Social Impact of European Airports & Air Connectivity”**², which shows that every 10% increase in air connectivity yields a 0.5% GDP per capita growth and 1.6% increase in jobs;
- iv) The **EUROCONTROL “Long-Term Outlook: 2024-2050”**³, which warns that without adequate airport capacity planning, development and delivery, up to 1.1 million flights could be left unaccommodated by 2050 – putting at risk the connectivity of tens of millions of European citizens;
- v) The **ACI World “Guidance on the Application of the ICAO Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management”**⁴ as a practical tool for regulators and airports to ensure consistent, proportionate, and outcome-focused noise management.

NOTING:

- i) That many European countries — both within and outside the EU — have either: a) disregarded the Balanced Approach procedure when introducing operating restrictions at airports (including notification requirements under Regulation 598/2014 in the case of EU countries); or b) applied the procedure in widely varying and sometimes inconsistent ways, thereby undermining its overall value and effectiveness;
- ii) That these actions undermine legal certainty, distort competition, fragment the Single Aviation Market (EU countries), hamper air connectivity and economic growth and ultimately do not effectively contribute to achieving the set noise objectives while at the same weakening Europe’s strategic position in global aviation;
- iii) That ineffectiveness or absence of land-use policies continue to allow residential developments in noise-sensitive zones around airports, exacerbating community exposure and fuelling political pressure for operating restrictions;

¹ [The Draghi Report: A Competitiveness Strategy for Europe](#)

² [SEO Amsterdam Economics study: The Economic and Social Impact of European Airports and Air Connectivity](#)

³ [EUROCONTROL Aviation Long-Term Outlook: 2024-2050](#)

⁴ [ACI World “Guidance on the Application of the ICAO Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management”](#)

- iv) That the WHO Guidelines for the European Region provide information for all environmental noise sources and therefore do not suggest the consideration in policy of one specific transport mode over another;
- v) That the effects of noise are a challenge for all transportation sources. Airports are actively encouraging the use of quieter aircraft through incentive schemes and performance-based navigation procedures, while also funding sound insulation programmes. Combined with airline fleet renewal, these measures are expected to lead to a 37% reduction in the number of people highly annoyed by aircraft noise by 2030 (EEA). In contrast, over the same period, the number of people highly annoyed by rail noise is projected to increase by 35%;
- vi) That the continued imposition of uncoordinated capacity constraints risks diverting traffic to non-European hubs, thereby undermining Europe's global competitiveness and contradicting growth, competitiveness, and sustainability objectives.

THEREFORE, DECLARES AND CALLS FOR:

1. **The full and consistent implementation of the ICAO Balanced Approach across all countries within the scope of ACI EUROPE**, with a particular emphasis on applying operating restrictions only after all other noise mitigation measures have been thoroughly assessed and demonstrably exhausted.
2. **The European Commission to:**
 - i) **Effectively enforce at all times and during all stages of the Balanced Approach procedure EU Regulation 598/2014;**
 - ii) **Reaffirm its oversight role by issuing clear guidance to EU countries;**
 - iii) **Actively engage, monitor and address cases of non-compliance with member states and relevant stakeholders;**
 - iv) **Champion the work of ICAO's Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection (CAEP) to support global consistency.**
3. **EU Member States and governments across Europe to:**
 - i) **Ensure that all Balanced Approach procedures are evidence-based, inclusive, and transparent**, with operational restrictions **considered as a last resort**;
 - ii) **Respect and promote technical and data-driven analysis and refrain from taking politically-driven decisions** putting at risk air connectivity and its economic and social benefits;
 - iii) **Adopt and enforce effective land-use planning policies** that prevent inappropriate residential development in noise-sensitive zones.
4. **The European Commission, EU Member States and governments across Europe to take an integrated, forward-looking view, recognising that airport capacity, connectivity, local noise situation and sustainability are not mutually exclusive, but must be addressed together to safeguard Europe's long-term competitiveness and global position – while at the same time ensuring a non-discriminatory, equal and fair treatment of all transport modes when it comes to noise management.**

With this Declaration, the European airport and airline communities are sending a clear political message: Europe must not allow fragmented noise policies to jeopardise the future of its air connectivity and aviation sector – and with it its competitiveness, global position and strategic autonomy.

Air connectivity is the lifeblood of our economies and societies – it supports 14 millions of jobs and 5% of European GDP, enables tourism and trade, and keeps European citizens connected. Europe's airports and airlines are determined to safeguard these benefits while responsibly managing noise and other environmental impacts.