

Airport industry launches its Manifesto for the new EU political cycle

ACI EUROPE

Boulevard du Régent 37-
40 (5th floor)
1000 Brussels, Belgium
www.aci-europe.org

ACI EUROPE President calls for EU Transport policy to ensure both sustainable and competitive air connectivity – for passengers, communities and the Planet

Brussels, 24 January 2024: Bringing together key political figures, policy makers and regulators together with industry representatives from the aviation and broader transport sectors, ACI EUROPE last night officially launched the airport industry's contribution to the EU institutions and Member States on the future of transport policy – just as the EU is about to embark on a new political cycle spanning the next 5 years.

Presenting the Manifesto, **ACI EUROPE President Armando Brunini**, who is also **CEO of SEA Milan Airports**, referred to sustainability and decarbonisation as "*the mother of all challenges*" – with disruptive EU Fit for 55 regulations driving a radical transformation of aviation. He warned about the significant socio-economic and competitive impacts involved, urging the EU to address what he referred to as "*the EU Fit for 55 implementation challenge*":

"There is no doubt that the recently adopted SAF mandates, revised ETS rules and AFIR requirements are all needed to decarbonise aviation. But there is also no escaping the fact that these new rules are very disruptive and come with significant risks of reduced air connectivity and competitiveness. This will impact not just airports, but also the communities and regions they serve - with potentially far reaching consequences for cohesion and territorial equality. We are now facing a Fit for 55 implementation challenge – and that requires further adaptations and accompanying measures to make sure we effectively decarbonise without leaving any airport nor community behind."

Accordingly, the primary strategic priority outlined by the ACI EUROPE Manifesto for EU transport policy is to **enable the decarbonisation of aviation while at the same time preserving its socio-economic benefits** through:

- i) Effective regulatory and financial support to ensure SAF production in Europe meets both the SAF mandates set by EU law and voluntary commitments from airlines – and also bridge the price gap with conventional fuels.

This requires a raft of accompanying measures from the inclusion of SAF in the scope of the 'strategic Net Zero Technology' under the EU Net Zero Industry Act to the extension of both, the SAF Accounting flexibility and the SAF allowance mechanisms (under RefuelEU and EU ETS) and further financial support for the development of SAF.

- ii) De-fragmenting Air Traffic Management and delivering the Single European Sky.
- iii) Abolishing national aviation taxes so that the sector can afford to finance its transition.
- iv) Preserving the ability of smaller and regional airports to receive operating aid under EU State Aid Guidelines.
- v) Launching a dedicated EU Strategy on intermodality.

Brunini went on to summarise the other 2 key strategic priorities outlined by the ACI EUROPE Manifesto:

- **Safeguard and reinforce the integrity of the Single Aviation Market.**

The EU Single Aviation Market is one of the greatest achievements of the EU. Whilst we are past the damages inflicted upon it by the COVID-19 pandemic, airline consolidation coupled with increasingly scarce airport capacity now involve significant market distortion risks.

"This requires a long overdue reform of EU airport slots rules¹, while also standing by and protecting the fundamental principles of our Single Market: the full freedom of airlines to provide services and establish anywhere in the EU " said Brunini who added: *"Looking ahead, this also calls for reinforcing our global positioning through the development of more comprehensive aviation agreements – in particular with India, Brazil, Mexico, South Korea and Japan, along with visa facilitation regimes."*

- **Enable resilient, digitalised and green airports.**

Brunini was adamant that as airports are increasingly moving from addressing those CO₂ emissions under their direct control to facilitating CO₂ reductions from aircraft, they need to prepare for the deployment of zero-emission aircraft: *"Being green will require access by airports to massive volumes of renewable energy as well as the development of new on-site production, storage and distribution facilities. Such needs and transformations must be factored into the EU Energy policy – involving EU-wide assessments, planning and financial support. Ultimately, this is about supporting airports² in moving from being transport hubs to also becoming energy hubs"*.

Crucially, along with airports' resilience and digitalisation agenda, this also requires addressing the investment crunch faced by Europe's airports – which in turn necessitates:

- i) National regulators to fully abide by the 'user pays' principle as regards airport charges while also allowing the modulation of these charges based on CO₂ emissions of aircraft – while ensuring regulatory stability at EU level.

- ii) Allowing airports to sell goods duty free to arriving passengers.

Concluding his remarks, Brunini said: *"Europe's airports have long ago moved from being mere infrastructure providers to fully fledged and diversified businesses in their own right. Such transformation, enabled by the Single Aviation Market, has been instrumental in making our airports global champions for service quality and operational efficiency, route development and cohesion, as well as - most importantly - sustainability and climate action³."*

"With the new EU political cycle coming at a time when our aviation market has undergone significant structural changes and the whole sector faces the unprecedented challenge of decarbonisation, we must future proof our European airport model and its societal value – for passengers, communities and the Planet. This is what our Manifesto is about and we look forward to engaging with all institutional and industry stakeholders in the coming months."

Download your copy of the ***Airport Industry Manifesto for the Next EU Political Cycle*** [here](#).

¹ ACI EUROPE Position Paper on airport slots: <https://www.aci-europe.org/component/attachments/attachments.html?id=1961>

² The investment crunch faced by Europe's airports results from the combination of: i) their debt and liabilities having increased by nearly €40 billion compared to pre-pandemic (2019), ii) structural operating cost increases due to inflationary pressures and iii) suboptimal and below inflation increases in aeronautical revenues (as of October 2023, airport charges at Europe's airports had on average increased by just +13.6%.)

³ 289 airports accounting for almost 80% of European passenger traffic are certified under *Airport Carbon Accreditation*. Last year, these airports achieved a CO₂ reduction of -450.000 tonnes (-20%). 130 of these airports have set a target date by 2030 or earlier for achieving net zero from CO₂ emissions under their direct control. For more information, visit [Airport Carbon Accreditation](#).

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For more information, contact:

Agata Lyznik
Director of Communications & Media
Tel: +32 2 552 09 89
Email: agata.lyznik@aci-europe.org

ACI EUROPE is the European region of Airports Council International (ACI), the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over 500 airports in 55 countries. Our members facilitate over 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe. Air transport supports 13.5 million jobs, generating €886 billion in European economic activity (4.4% of GDP). In response to the Climate Emergency, in June 2019 our members committed to achieving Net Zero carbon emissions for operations under their control by 2050, without offsetting.