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Airports vocal about unprecedented and critical challenges facing European aviation

ACI EUROPE

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Brussels, 28 January 2025: Addressing officials from the EU institutions and Member States along with key industry partners and stakeholders at the annual ACI EUROPE New Year reception this evening, **Armando Brunini, the association's President and CEO of SEA Milan Airports**, urged policymakers to adopt bold, forward-thinking approaches to secure the competitive and sustainable future of European aviation — amid radically changed geopolitical, environmental and economic landscapes.

"More than ever, Europe finds itself at a crossroads, facing critical tests to its global position and leadership, both politically and economically," said Brunini *"The new era demands courage, vision, and unity from all of us, including our policymakers and regulators. We cannot face these unprecedented challenges with yesterday's textbooks. This is particularly true for aviation."*

GEOPOLITICS: RAISING THE BAR ON AVIATION SECURITY

With tensed geopolitics translating into increased security threats for aviation, Brunini called for the EU to develop its own fully integrated testing and certification system for aviation security equipment: *"This would allow the EU to keep pace with and support the development and deployment of critical security technology — and should be part of the EU's strategic autonomy agenda."*

Brunini referred in that context to the reintroduction last September of restrictions to carriage of liquids and gels, which has clearly impacted the industry's trust in the current testing and certification system. He reminded that many airports had spent millions of euros on deployment of the latest screening technology with the objective of improving both security and passenger experience, only to be told its certification was no longer valid.

Beyond this specific issue, Brunini also called for more EU support for security capacity building and financing for strategic infrastructure like airports: *"It is high time for a reality check."*

DECARBONISATION & CAPACITY: LESSONS FROM THE DRAGHI REPORT

Moving to the decarbonisation imperative, Brunini confirmed the support of Europe's airports to Fit for 55, but warned that cutting emissions should not mean curtailing air connectivity — and with it Europe's competitiveness and global positioning.

Referring to the Draghi report he said: *"We need more flexibility and more support to make sure we can decarbonise while at the same time preserving the unique economic and social benefits of air connectivity. In other words, we urgently need an EU Aviation Industrial Strategy. That strategy must start with our inclusion in the forthcoming Clean Industrial Deal — and it must also include a book & claim system to support the most efficient deployment of SAF across the airport network along with more free ETS allowances for SAF."*

Brunini went on to point to the disproportionate impact of Fit for 55 on small regional airports and urged the European Commission to adapt its State aid guidelines accordingly: *"The current State aid guidelines do not factor in the fact that by increasing the cost of flying, Fit for 55 will make it more difficult for these airports to retain and attract airlines — thus further compromising their financial viability. This means that allowing these airports to keep receiving operating aid will be crucial to safeguard cohesion and territorial equality."*

Commenting on these challenges, **MEP Daniel Attard**, Member of the Committee for Transport and Tourism of the European Parliament and co-host of the event said: *"I am fully aware of the crucial importance for our local communities and regions to be able to rely on their airports. Indeed, an airport is truly what puts you not just on the European but on the global map — and there is no escaping the fact that every 10% increase in air connectivity comes with a 0.5% gain in GDP per capita. This is why the specific economic and financial challenges faced by our small regional airports must be recognised by the European Commission in its State aid guidelines, so that Europe preserves its regional airport network. That network is a strategic asset for our Union and its people."*

Beyond smaller regional airports, Brunini also stressed the need to preserve and sustainably develop the European airport network — allowing for capacity expansion where needed: *"This is what the Draghi report is about and it is extremely concerning to see some Member States ignoring that — limiting the capacity of their major airports without even respecting the EU rules on the balanced approach. We call on the Commission to ensure these rules are strictly adhered to."*

SINGLE AVIATION MARKET INTEGRITY & AIRPORT SLOTS

Concluding on the ongoing 'Fitness Check' consultations on airport regulations by the European Commission, Brunini made the case for a long overdue reform of airport slots rules: *"These rules date back over 30 years and reflect an aviation market that no longer exists. They must be adapted to the reality of the capacity crunch we are facing, as well as airlines consolidating — so as to ensure a better use of scarce airport capacity and more transparency. This is first and foremost about safeguarding the integrity of our Single Aviation Market."*

His statements were echoed by **MEP Jens Gieseke**, Member of the Committee for Transport and Tourism of the European Parliament and also co-host of the event: *"We need a strategic action plan for the EU aviation sector to identify opportunities for reducing administrative burdens, ensure a level playing field within the industry, and evaluate the financial resources necessary to sustain competitiveness amid decarbonisation pressures."*

ENDS

Note to Editors

Learn more about ACI EUROPE's policy recommendations from the 2025 Policy Briefing, available for download [here](#).

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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. Airports and air connectivity support 14 million jobs, generating €851 billion in European economic activity (5% 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.