FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Energy crisis deepens strains on regional airports – calls for urgent policy responses

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

Torino, 28 April 2026: The annual ACI EUROPE Regional Airports Conference & Exhibition is today bringing Europe's regional aviation community together in Torino, hosted by Torino Airport.

The event takes place as the aviation ecosystem is bracing for the impact of war in the Middle East – to which regional airports are particularly vulnerable. The energy crisis triggered by the war only adds to the challenges brought about by recent structural aviation market changes and inadequate EU and national policies – exacerbating the fragility of Europe's regional airport network and the regional connectivity that is vital to the continent's cohesion.

IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES & EXISTENTIAL THREAT

The dramatic increase in jet fuel prices in Europe – peaking at more than $1800/ton earlier this month – is resulting in air fare increases and tight capacity management by airlines. Regional airports are the most exposed to the fallout of these adjustments, as demand on their routes is typically much more price-sensitive and price-elastic – and thus less profitable for airlines. This means that when considering where to cut capacity, airlines are more likely to do so on routes serving regional airports, as shown by the recent decision by Lufthansa to shut down its regional subsidiary, CityLine.

Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE said: "*The post-COVID-19 reality had already revealed a multi-speed regional airport market – with a clear divide between small regional airports[1] whose passenger traffic still remains more than 30% below 2019 levels, and larger ones[2] who have seen their traffic increasing by more than 16%. The current levels of jet fuels prices and the prospect of a new cost-of-living crisis mean that many regional airports across our continent are likely to face both a supply and demand shock. For them, this is nothing short of an existential threat.*"

Only adding to these difficulties is the stunted roll out of the Schengen Entry/Exit System (EES), which is set to wreak havoc at regional airports serving popular tourist destinations this Summer. The photo displayed at the event of passengers – queuing not within the terminal but directly on the tarmac of a Greek regional airport earlier this month – provided yet another irrefutable illustration of the need to allow border control authorities to suspend the EES when operationally justified.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY, CONNECTIVITY & POLICY CHALLENGES

Despite inflationary pressures and increased traffic seasonality driving structural cost increases, user charges at small regional airports have on average remained 11% below their pre-pandemic levels – without even accounting for the extensive rebates and discounts granted to attract and retain airlines' business. This is resulting in these airports on average losing €2.64 per passenger.

Looking ahead, financial viability will remain elusive. This is confirmed by many independent studies and the European Commission's own evaluation study completed last March as part of the review of the EU Aviation State Aid Guidelines. The impact of the war in the Middle East is further worsening this outlook.

Yet, regional airports are part of Europe's critical infrastructure, as set out by **Andrea Andorno, CEO of Torino Airport and Chair of the ACI EUROPE Regional Airports Forum**: "*Considering that they are channeling 35% of Europe's air connectivity, regional airports are clearly indispensable enablers of the EU's Single Market, and essential for cohesion and regional development. An airport is truly what puts a community not just on the European but on the global map. Our strategic relevance has been growing in recent years, strengthening the role we play in the EU's tourism diversification agenda. This calls for effective EU and national policy frameworks to support regional airports*."

Accordingly, ACI EUROPE and its Regional Airports Forum are calling for:

1. **Abolishing national aviation taxes**. These taxes should as a matter of priority be suspended to provide relief for the aviation and tourism sectors as well as consumers throughout the energy crisis triggered by the conflict in the Middle East.

2. **Safeguarding operating aid for regional airports of up to 1 million passengers per year**. The European Commission's own economic study has confirmed that airports serving up to 680,000 passengers annually struggle to cover operating costs. With increasing regulatory costs and more frequent traffic shocks, it is important to permit targeted aid at even higher thresholds. This aligns with the EU's priorities for competitiveness, cohesion and strategic autonomy, which require a strong and resilient regional airport network.

3. **Accelerating aviation decarbonisation through additional support for the production and deployment of affordable Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) as well as the implementation of the recently adopted AZEA Roadmap** for the deployment of hybrid, electric and hydrogen aircraft in Europe. This Roadmap shows the significant and transformative potential that these aircraft will offer for regional air connectivity

in particular – with up to 2.55 million net zero regional flights operated by 2050.

4. **Allowing the full suspension of the Schengen EES in case of excessive and unmanageable waiting times at border control throughout the Summer season 2026 and beyond**.

5. **Safeguarding and further developing Open Skies Agreements at EU level to boost connectivity and competitiveness.**

---

[1] Airports with less than 1 million passengers per year.

[2] Airports with 1 to less than 5 million passengers per year.

ENDS

For more information, contact:

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

About ACI EUROPE

ACI EUROPE is the European region of Airports Council International (ACI), the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over 600 airports in 55 countries. Our members facilitate over 95% 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.