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## ACI EUROPE President warns of EES chaos and calls for competitiveness-focused Aviation Strategy

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**Prague, 23 June 2026:** Speaking at ACI EUROPE's 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress & General Assembly in Prague, the association's President & CEO of Fraport, Stefan Schulte, today called on the European Commission to deliver an Aviation Strategy that restores Europe's competitiveness by empowering aviation to invest, innovate, strengthen its resilience, and enable decarbonisation.

### EES IMPACT UNMANAGEABLE

In a high-level discussion with Magda Kopczyńska, Director General for Mobility and Transport at the European Commission, Schulte started by issuing a stark warning over the continued operational and passenger impacts of the Schengen Entry Exit System (EES) – stressing the urgent need for preventive coordinated action to ensure the seamless and safe movement of passengers at border control.

*"Right now, EES is what keeps me and many other airport CEOs across Europe awake at night. Passengers are queueing for hours at peak traffic times and I just do not know how we will be able to cope in the coming weeks with the expected increase in traffic. EU Home Affairs Commissioner Brunner and Home Affairs Ministers must stop pretending the situation is manageable and that the EES is working just fine. It is not. We urgently need full flexibility for border control authorities to suspend the EES whenever needed to avoid further chaos – along with a rethink of those processes. This is about showing respect and decency for those who chose to travel to the EU, and safeguarding our reputation as a welcoming and efficient destination."*

### STRATEGIC POLICY & COMPETITIVE RESET

Looking ahead to the European Commission's Aviation Strategy, expected later this year, Schulte urged for a policy refocused on the positive externalities of air connectivity:

*"Over the past decade, EU policy has focused almost exclusively on our negative externalities. While we must keep addressing climate and noise impacts, Europe can no longer overlook aviation's strategic value. Air connectivity underpins the Single Market, powers tourism and the Experience Economy. It connects regions, attracts investments and supports millions of jobs. All this means aviation is central to the EU's competitiveness, strategic autonomy, cohesion and global positioning agenda."*

Schulte then went on to outline the key objectives and measures to put aviation back on track and future-proof it.

## **1. Preserve and optimise airport capacity**

With Europe being home to half of the world's most congested airports and adding new capacity being extremely difficult, modernising the 30 years' old EU Slot Regulation is crucial to make the most of existing capacity and better align with the connectivity needs of regions and local communities.

Schulte commented: *"This is not just a technical issue. With airline consolidation advancing, slot reform is also the most important issue to safeguard the well-functioning and integrity of our Single Aviation Market."*

## **2. Allow airports to invest and transform**

With Europe's investment deficit now recognised as a major obstacle to competitiveness, infrastructure investment has become a strategic EU priority. Europe's airports are uniquely positioned to contribute – especially as airport investment is predominantly commercial and largely driven by private capital and thus does not burden public finances.

The scale of the opportunity is significant, with Europe's airports investment needs standing at €360 billion over the next decades – and with the top 10 European airports alone planning to invest €36 billion in the next 5 years.

However, Schulte warned that a revision of the EU Airport Charges Directive would put these investments at risk: *"To materialise, these investments require legal certainty and regulatory stability – as investors need confidence in a predictable framework to commit capital to long-term airport infrastructure projects. Revising the EU Airport Charges Directive would do exactly the opposite. It would open a Pandora's box, leaving investors in the dark for several years. Preserving a stable regulatory environment is critical to ensuring airports can continue to deliver the infrastructure needed for Europe's competitiveness."*

## **3. Safeguard regional air connectivity**

Ensuring that smaller regional airports can keep receiving operating and financing aid whenever necessary is essential to preserve cohesion and territorial equality. This requires urgent and significant amendments to the draft State aid guidelines for aviation recently published by the European Commission.

## **4. Support innovation and resilience**

Schulte pointed to the need for:

- Continued financial support for both SESAR Research and Deployment within the next EU Financial Framework, so as to keep developing technologies

boosting airport operational performance and integration with Air Traffic Management.

- Efficient and streamlined EU testing and certification of aviation security equipment as well as the removal of undue regulatory constraints to the deployment of biometrics at European airports – which he said was essential for improving the passenger experience and their competitive position.

## **5. Enable competitive decarbonisation**

Schulte reiterated the calls made by ACI EUROPE together with its DESTINATION 2050 partners for more effective EU support fully aligned with the net zero ambition: *"Let's be honest: with the policies and regulations currently in place, Europe is losing on both fronts. We are not reducing aviation's emissions at the pace required, and we are steadily eroding our position in an increasingly competitive global market. Time is running out, and the upcoming Aviation Strategy must make sure we turn the tide by complementing regulatory obligations with the incentives urgently needed to accelerate decarbonisation."*

Schulte referred to the earmarking of Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) revenues for aviation decarbonisation, more Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) allowances under the ETS after 2030, an effective Book & Claim system for SAF and the full integration of airports into EU and national energy planning and grid upgrades. Conversely, he was adamant that extending the ETS to all EU departing flights would further weaken European aviation and defy geopolitical realities.

**## ENDS ##**

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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 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.