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ACI EUROPE President calls for risk-based & uniform global travel regimes if airport recovery is to be anything more than a “moving target”

Uncoordinated travel restrictions, imbalances in fiscal aid and regulatory support for climate action singled out in annual address

Geneva, 26 October 2021: Speaking at ACI EUROPE’s Annual Congress and General Assembly today, **the association’s President, Jost Lammers**, took to the stage with a hard-hitting analysis of the consequences of uncoordinated global travel restrictions, of imbalances in fiscal aid, and the threat to climate action without regulatory support.

Addressing the airport community, industry partners and institutional stakeholders present in Geneva, Lammers called for global alignment and risk-based approaches in restoring movement as the restart limps forwards. He was adamant that more international guidance was needed to bring into line the ‘*incredible patchwork*’ of travel regimes. Underpinning this should be the principles of unrestricted travel for the vaccinated, and an acceptance of testing protocols for those who are not.

Ultimately, a fully digitised global standard for health status verification will be the imperative if airports are to handle gradually increasing passenger traffic. And here, Lammers was quick to praise the European model. The **EU Digital Covid Certificate** presents a ready-made proven solution – one which each European can be proud of, and a template for the digitally interoperable health status credentials which are set to be a lasting feature of air travel.

With the focus on Europe, Lammers stressed the imperative for seamlessly aligning travel regimes both within the European Union borders and beyond, as he pointed to an emerging **European Health Union**. In a blunt short-term message for those Governments still imposing any restrictions upon the vaccinated, Lammers had particular criticism for the UK’s actions as ignoring risk-based evidence and ‘*defying logic*’. This, he said, hurts not just UK aviation, but the UK economy as a whole.

State aid rules, airport charges and airport slots in the spotlight

Turning to the ability of Europe’s airports to recover, the ACI EUROPE President described a bleak landscape of systemic financial weakness across the industry as airports kept operating for months with nearly no revenues and without the “*financial largesse*” extended to several major airlines. Airports were also deliberately left out of the €750 billion EU Recovery plan and had no option other than to borrow their way into massive debt. Now faced with a cost-intensive and revenue-weak recovery, their ability to invest in sustainability, digitalisation and capacity has clearly been jeopardised.

With costs already trimmed down, the absence of further financial support from Governments and of more flexible State aid rules, the solution for many airports can only rest in increasing user charges. Ultimately, as both critical infrastructure and businesses in their own right, airports must remain viable.

Referring to the recent headlines surrounding IATA's accusations over **airport charges**, Lammers described adjustments to user charges as nothing more than a '*reality check*' - as '*money does not grow on trees at airports*'. He denounced IATA's own logic of using airports as instruments of subsidisation for airlines as taking us back to the 1960s and being at odds with the European model. This model relies on airports being "*independent commercial concerns abiding to fiscal discipline*".

In this context, Lammers called upon the European Commission to '*remain absolutely committed to preserving the integrity and resilience of the Single Aviation Market*' - of which airports as businesses on their own right is an essential part.

In a similar vein, he also called for the overhaul of the **EU Slot Regulation** which also came under fire, as the pandemic has exposed the true cost to airports, air connectivity and consumers of an outdated system ill-suited to a crisis.

Facing forwards – Destination 2050 and a sustainable aviation future

Despite the well-known tensions over airport charges and slot usage, Lammers was also quick to stress that airline and airport relationships are strong. One area of aviation collaboration which is already reaping results – the collective commitment to decarbonise and align with the Paris Agreement.

Since his last annual address, the European aviation sector has successfully delivered together an ambitious [joint roadmap to get to Net Zero CO₂ emissions by 2050](#).

But again, there are shortfalls in the partnership needed from the EU and Member States, with mixed signals from both. The proposed mandates on sustainable aviation fuels and the targets for electricity supply set out in Fit for 55 are solid moves forwards, yet they will require significant financial support and effective incentives to de-risk investments. Also under fire was the debate around the restriction on domestic flights – the very testbed for electrically powered aircraft.

Lammers reiterated his call for EC President von der Leyen to accept the industry's invitation to form an **[EU PACT FOR SUSTAINABLE AVIATION](#)** which would represent a significant step change in the alignment between industry and regulators working towards what is, after all, a commonly held goal.

Announced today – a public repository of airport roadmaps to Net Zero CO₂ emissions

In closing his address, Lammers announced another first from the airport industry in the journey to Net Zero CO₂ emissions. Today, Europe's airports took their commitment and delivery on carbon reduction one step further with the launch of a **[Public Repository](#)** of airport roadmaps. The Repository launches with the plans of 19 operators, which between them represent 117 European airports. With this level of transparency in terms of the plans that underpin the promises, the airport industry once again leads the way in tangible progress towards our decarbonised future. ACI EUROPE is also publishing today practical **[Guidance for airports on the development of actionable net zero carbon roadmaps](#)**.

President Jost Lammers' Welcome Address can be accessed [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. 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.