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Europe's airports address MEPs on state aid, passenger rights & noise

For immediate release

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Brussels, 22 January 2014: European airport trade body ACI EUROPE yesterday met with Members of the European Parliament during an evening reception at the European Parliament in Brussels, hosted by Georges Bach MEP (Luxembourg).

The event was attended by the Board of ACI EUROPE which is comprised of 22 airport CEOs from 16 European countries. Officials from several European institutions, including the European Commission and EUROCONTROL, as well as representatives from Member States and the wider aviation industry were also present.

Addressing the gathering, **Arnaud Feist, ACI EUROPE President & CEO of Brussels Airport Company** used the moment to remind those present of three important policy proposals that the EU is likely to make further progress with, before the summer this year.*

1. STATE AID GUIDELINES FOR AVIATION

In a matter of weeks, the European Commission is expected to adopt its new **State Aid Guidelines**. Feist was unequivocal about the need for a final result that strikes the right balance between competition and the role of airports for economic development and job creation.**

Feist commented *"The industry needs State aid rules that are fairer, more transparent and more effective. While the Commission has worked along these lines, we still have concerns about the impact of the new rules on our communities. Many MEPs share these concerns. They have publicly called on President Barroso not to cause a shutdown^o in Europe by imposing unrealistic limitations on the financing of smaller airports. The implications go beyond the aviation sector. This is about promoting growth and protecting jobs across Europe's regions."*

2. PASSENGER RIGHTS

The second policy area raised was the revised **Passenger Rights Regulations**. Commending the excellent work done by Mr Bach as rapporteur, Feist supported the MEP's proposal to outlaw the abusive one bag rule, which a few dominant airlines have been using to prevent passengers from taking their airport purchases on board unless they fit in their cabin bag – and thus boost their own in-flight sales.

"Many of our airports are confronted by airlines implementing the abusive one-bag rule every day. It is causing a lot of stress and inconvenience for passengers. We see that even some passengers flying on airlines not applying the one bag rule are wary of buying at the airport, because of the confusion this situation is creating. There is little doubt that this practice downgrades the travelling experience. It also threatens our ability to modernize and develop our infrastructure through commercial revenues. This absolutely must be recognised and resolved by the Parliament and the Council."

Recognising the need to ban the one bag rule so as to protect passenger rights, **Georges Bach MEP**, commented *"As the rapporteur on the issue of air passengers rights, my objective is to put the passenger at the centre of interest of this directive and to strengthen his rights when it comes to application and implementation of the European laws."*

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3. AVIATION NOISE

Feist reiterated ACI EUROPE's support for the Commission's proposal on aviation noise, but underlined a concern on one aspect of the European Parliament's position: the provisions on health impact.

On this Feist commented *"Don't get me wrong. Nobody denies that noise can have an impact on health. But the point is that we still don't have an authoritative agreed methodology on how to assess this impact."*

He added *"If we include these provisions in the new Regulation, any attempt to carry out a health impact assessment would most likely be challenged in court - effectively blocking the process and thus delaying the withdrawal from operations of the noisiest aircraft. This is certainly not the outcome we wish for. As airports, the ability to communicate to our communities a calendar for the withdrawal of these aircraft is absolutely essential."*

ENDS

Notes for Editors

* 2014 is a year of changeover with the European Parliamentary elections taking place in May and a new college of European Commissioners being appointed in the autumn.

** See ACI EUROPE's Analysis Paper on this subject, entitled *AIRPORTS & STATE AID: How to Protect Both Growth & Competition*, downloadable from <http://bit.ly/KFEsVs>

° In November 2013, over 50 MEPs signed an open letter initiated by Franck Proust MEP calling on President Barroso. The letter was also published in the European Voice newspaper: <http://bit.ly/1ewnLXr>

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