

**ACI EUROPE**

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# Connectivity & consumers should be the focus of the EU aviation strategy

For immediate release

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**Prague, 25 June 2015:** On the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> ACI EUROPE Annual Assembly, Congress and Exhibition taking place in Prague today, **Arnaud Feist, President of ACI EUROPE** and CEO of Brussels Airport addressed the gathering of some 350 delegates from the wider aviation sector and institutional stakeholders, including **EU Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc**. He took the opportunity to outline the views of Europe's airports on the forthcoming **EU Aviation Strategy** – in particular on the much debated issue of **Open Skies**.

Referring to new data from ACI EUROPE's **2015 Airport Industry Connectivity Report**, Feist stressed the need for the EU to place air connectivity and consumers at the very heart of its new aviation strategy.

He said *"Policy making in Europe needs to take stock of the increased strategic relevance of air connectivity for growth and jobs. Together with airlines and our other aviation partners, airports in Europe account for **4,1% of European GDP** and nearly **12 million jobs**. With the shift under way in the Global economy to emerging markets, remaining connected and open for business is an absolute imperative for Europe. This is why Open Skies should be a no brainer. The logic of it is bullet-proof: consumers love it, and so does the economy."*

Feist went on announcing the release of a joint position on Open Skies by ACI EUROPE and the ETC (European Travel Commission), which represents National Tourism Organisations. This position underlines the need to support connectivity by expanding Open Skies beyond Europe. The priority should be about replicating the benefits achieved by the 2006 EU-US aviation agreement with the EU's main trading partners - including ASEAN, China, the Gulf countries, India and Turkey. These EU-negotiated agreements should aim at liberalising market access on international air routes for both passenger and freight services. They should also achieve regulatory convergence on key issues relating to the efficient functioning of a liberalised aviation market – including fair competition.

## **ABOUT THAT DEBATE...**

Addressing the on-going public debate on the expansion of the Gulf airlines in Europe and the US, the President of ACI EUROPE was very clear: *"Open Skies and fair competition need to go hand in hand. But Europe's airports and Tourism Organisations do not regard the public financing of airport infrastructure, start-up aid for airlines and more favourable fiscal regimes as necessarily involving unfair competition – but rather as legitimate economic development policy choices, made by the Gulf States."*

Referring to the position the European airlines attacking their Gulf competitors, he added *"These airlines are our long time partners. For many of us, their fate is also our fate. They are right in saying that the expansion of the Gulf airlines and of the Gulf airports is a fierce challenge for European aviation. But the issues they raise and the remedies they propose are the wrong ones. This is not so much about how the Gulf States are nurturing their aviation sector and nor should it be about closing our market. Rather, this is primarily about how Europe is not supporting its own aviation sector."*

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*And let's be honest, this is also about how we as European industry – airlines, airports and ATM providers – all need to keep working on improving our own competitive positions.”*

Beyond these necessary efforts, Feist stressed that the key issue for European aviation was policy change. Apart from an ambitious agenda for Open Skies, Europe's airports were united with National Tourism Organisations in calling for the EU's new Aviation Strategy to promote connectivity by addressing a range of issues. These include more liberal and tourist-friendly visa policies, addressing the looming airport capacity crunch, abolishing aviation taxes, reducing regulatory driven costs – in particular for security and safety – and last but not least, making real progress in implementing the Single European Sky.

He concluded *"This is a time for new policy directions and we do look forward to such change. Our agenda for aviation connectivity is a compelling case for Europe, its citizens and its economy. The European airport community is very much looking forward to working with you – Commissioner Bulc – on these issues."*

**## ENDS ##**

### **Notes for Editors:**

The full speech of Mr Feist can be downloaded [here](#).

The *ACI EUROPE Airport Connectivity Report 2015*, is a new study of airport connectivity in Europe, produced in partnership with SEO Aviation Economics. To download a copy of the report, click [here](#).

The joint position paper of ACI EUROPE and the European Travel Commission entitled *European Airports & Tourism Organisation – Together on Open Skies* can be downloaded [here](#).

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*ACI EUROPE is the European region of Airports Council International, the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over 450 airports in 44 European countries. In 2013, member airports handled 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe, welcoming over 1.7 billion passengers, 16.8 million tonnes of freight and more than 20.8 million aircraft movements.*

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