



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ACI EUROPE calls on the European Commission to urgently enforce Noise Balanced Approach principles across the EU

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Brussels, 5 March 2025: Today, the European Commission published an important decision on the process leading to the implementation of noise operating restrictions at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport (the so called "Balanced Approach"). Other airports in the EU, including in Belgium, France and Ireland risk facing (or are facing as the case may be) operating restrictions that might limit their ability to accommodate passenger demand in the future. Noting the Amsterdam decision and looking to other impending cases, **ACI EUROPE calls for immediate and decisive action to ensure full and consistent application of the Balanced Approach to aircraft noise management across the European Union.**

The Balanced Approach, as defined under Regulation (EU) No 598/2014, provides a mandatory process for managing aircraft noise at airports. This process requires that any noise-related operating restrictions are only considered as a last resort — and only after all other measures have been fully assessed. These measures include land-use planning, noise abatement operational procedures, and technological advancements in aircraft noise reduction (noise at source).

This proportionate and evidence-based approach ensures that restrictions are not only tailored to the local noise situation but also cost-effective, safeguarding both environmental protection and air connectivity along with its economic and social benefits.

A GROWING PATTERN OF NON-COMPLIANCE

ACI EUROPE is increasingly alarmed by the **systematic disregard** for this legal process in several EU Member States. Specifically:

- **Numerous noise-related operating restrictions** have been imposed without proper notification to the **European Commission**, violating clear obligations under **Regulation (EU) No 598/2014**.
- In **multiple instances**, operating restrictions have been **introduced without following the legally required Balanced Approach procedure**.

This disregard for EU law not only undermines the legal certainty airports and airlines rely upon, but it actively threatens the integrity of Europe's aviation market.

AIRCRAFT NOISE IS DECREASING — BUT ARBITRARY RESTRICTIONS ARE INCREASING

Aircraft noise is a highly sensitive and emotionally charged topic, that tends to be heavily politicised. Over the past decades, airports, airlines, aircraft manufacturers, and Air Navigation Service Providers have worked closely together to minimise the negative externalities of aviation activities by implementing the various elements of the Balanced Approach that are within their control (by contrast, land use planning policies are the responsibility of local authorities). Airports, in particular, have a long track record of actively listening to and engaging with the local communities they serve, striving to achieve the best possible outcomes for people living around airports.

From adopting enhanced low-noise operational procedures to offering incentives for airlines to operate quieter aircraft, implementing noise insulation programmes, and even supporting relocation in certain cases, airports have consistently left no stone unturned in their efforts to minimise the impact of their operations. Their commitment to this cause remains unwavering, and they will continue to actively seek to reduce noise impacts in the future.

However, Member States current failure to apply the Balanced Approach appears to ignore the **significant progress** that airports and airlines have made in reducing aircraft noise in the last 20 years. In addition, in 2024, aircraft movements at EU airports were down by **2.2%** compared to pre-pandemic levels (2019), while the ongoing introduction of **quieter, more fuel-efficient aircraft** continues to **shrink the noise footprint** around airports.

For example, the Airbus A320neo family reduces the noise footprint on the ground by 50% compared to its predecessor — a clear demonstration of how technology, innovation and investment are delivering results. According to the European Environment Agency, and based on anticipated aircraft fleet replacement as well as enhanced operational procedures, the number of people highly annoyed by aircraft noise in the EU is expected to decrease by -37% by 2030. It should be noted that this compares to an expected +35% increase of people highly annoyed by rail noise¹.

TIME FOR ACTION

Given these facts, ACI EUROPE is calling on the European Commission to urgently:

- **Strengthen its oversight and enforcement powers to ensure Member States fully comply with the Balanced Approach requirements.**
- **Develop clear and practical guidelines to drive consistent and correct implementation of the Balanced Approach at all EU airports.**

ACI EUROPE stands ready to work with the European Commission to achieve these objectives.

CONNECTIVITY AND COMPETITIVENESS AT RISK

ACI EUROPE also warns that unilateral, disproportionate restrictions imposed outside the Balanced Approach framework do not just impact airports — they also undermine the connectivity and competitiveness of the entire EU aviation sector.

Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE said: *"These restrictions will ultimately divert traffic away from EU airports, eroding Europe's connectivity, and weakening economic growth. With every 10% increase in direct air connectivity driving 0.5% GDP per capita growth, the economic damage is real — and it is entirely self-inflicted. Our concerns fully align with the Draghi report, which laid bare the vital importance of air connectivity to Europe's competitiveness and strategic autonomy — making clear that our infrastructure will need to expand to tackle congestion and unlock further growth. This all comes just as EUROCONTROL is forecasting that, by 2050, up to 1.1 million flights could go unaccommodated due to insufficient airport capacity — threatening Europe's ability to compete globally."*

BALANCED APPROACH: A SMARTER PATH FORWARD

ACI EUROPE strongly advocates for noise management policies that are both effective and proportionate. This means:

- **Stronger land-use planning** to prevent noise-sensitive development around airports.
- **Fleet renewal** incentives to accelerate the deployment of quieter aircraft.
- **Constructive engagement** between airports, airlines, local authorities and communities to ensure balanced solutions tailored to local needs.

Jankovec concluded: *"This is the only way to protect the interests of local communities, safeguard connectivity, and maintain Europe's strategic position in global aviation."*

1 European Environment Agency, Outlook to 2030 — Can the number of people affected by transport noise be cut by 30%?

ENDS

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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 600 airports in 55 countries. Our members facilitate over 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe. Air transport supports 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. Based in Brussels, we lead and serve the European airport industry and maintain strong links with other ACI regions throughout the world.