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05 May 2006

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ROLE OF AIR TRANSPORT RECOGNISED BY REGULATORS AT SALZBURG SUMMIT

European aviation should be 'dynamic, efficient and a world leader' says AEA

The European Air Transport industry met with its regulators and political decision-makers on 4 and 5 May in Salzburg in a historic high-level summit hosted by the Austrian Presidency of the EU, with the theme 'A Stronger Partner for the European Economy'.

The Summit's origins can be traced back to the AEA Action Plan which, in 2004, set out the Association's vision of the five-year political agenda necessary to reinforce the industry's position as a key component of European competitiveness.

A feature of the Action Plan was a call for a high-level conference at which government ministers and European regulators would meet with the industry to consider the elements of a comprehensive strategy for sustainable growth and economic stability within the sector.

A key speaker at the Salzburg conference was the 2006 AEA Chairman and CEO of Lufthansa, Wolfgang Mayrhuber. His presentation highlighted the underlying themes of the Action Plan and the conference itself: air transport is fundamental to European prosperity; it needs political will to secure the infrastructure capacity which will allow it to grow in an environmentally-responsible way, but it is beset by competitive pressures both within and beyond Europe.

Although European Air Traffic Management is safe, it is too costly. AEA supports and contributes significantly to the technological programme to redraw the aerial map of Europe, SESAR, as an integral part of the creation of a Single European Sky.

Major European airports are increasingly congested and costly, with few incentives to reduce their costs. Insufficient airport infrastructure cannot be improved by micromanagement of slot allocation procedures, but by encouraging investments into airport capacity at the major European airports where it is most needed.

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Although, objectively, aviation is currently only a marginal contributor to greenhouse-gas emissions, AEA has developed a comprehensive Emissions Containment Policy, developing procedures and template economic models which could ultimately, particularly at a global level contribute to reducing the impact of aviation growth on the environment.

Security remains an important issue for the travelling public and for policy-makers. While AEA wishes to contribute to a coherent security policy based on risk assessment and subject to agreed international standards, it should be funded publicly. As regards safety matters, AEA favours a clearly defined scope of responsibility for the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

A coherent policy, too, is required for Europe's external aviation relations. It should be directed at a convergence of differing aviation policies so as to gradually create a level playing-field internationally, as a prerequisite for free and fair competition globally.

"Mobile societies are wealthy societies," according to Mr Mayrhuber. "Air transport, and only air transport, connects all the regions of Europe, central and peripheral, with each other. Air transport, and only air transport, connects the whole of Europe with the rest of the world. And Europe's growth market is the world market".

AEA applauds the initiative of the Austrian Presidency, the commitment of Commission Vice-President Jacques Barrot and the support of Director-General for Transport Matthias Ruete in the realisation of the Salzburg Summit. "We hope that the Salzburg event will be the first in a series of such summits, so that participants can monitor progress towards the creation of an aviation sector capable of sustainable growth", said Wolfgang Mayrhuber.

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