



# Integrated EU Aviation Policy

Position paper – September 2015<sup>1</sup>

***“In light of the fragmented airline landscape, the increasingly competitive non-EU hubs, the slow progress towards implementation of a Single European Sky and the increasing risk of insufficient connectivity to smaller and/or peripheral regions, the Commission’s strategy should be driven by a vision of how best to promote European competitiveness without distorting competition or undermining the social and labour relations.”***

**Jacek Krawczyk**, rapporteur for the EESC Opinion on an Integrated EU Aviation Policy

## Introduction

The economic benefits that aviation brings to Europe extend far beyond the air transport industry (which generated an estimated 2.6 million jobs in Europe in 2012 alone). In addition to providing connectivity and mobility for people and businesses, the industry enables sectors such as tourism and other transport-dependent areas to thrive. Furthermore, aviation is one of the most advanced and technologically innovative of industries, with European manufacturing of aviation hardware and software matching the world’s highest standards.

Nonetheless, aviation in Europe currently finds itself at a crucial juncture. Many major airports are approaching saturation level, traffic growth is shifting to Asian regions, and non-EU carriers are growing their respective aircraft fleets significantly. The level of profitability among major airlines in Europe is often not sufficient to cover expenditure. Without a coherent EU-wide aviation strategy that builds upon Europe’s strengths and brings together stakeholders from across Europe, growth opportunities for many European economies could be jeopardised.

## What the EU is doing

A number of regulatory initiatives have been carried out at EU level. One of the most important of these is the Single European Sky<sup>2</sup>, which began in 2004 and was subsequently updated in 2008 and 2013. This project aims to reform air traffic management in order to cope with sustained air traffic growth more cost efficiently

whilst maintaining Europe’s extremely high safety and labour standards. Similarly, the 2011 Airport Package sought to address capacity shortage at Europe’s airports and to improve the quality of passenger service<sup>3</sup>.

In March 2013, the European Commission announced a package of measures updating air passengers’ rights. It also intensified cooperation with EU and European agencies, such as the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA)<sup>4</sup> and EUROCONTROL<sup>5</sup>, as well as promoting a broad range of activities related to the international dimension of EU air transport.

In February 2014, the Commission adopted a Review of State Aid Rules<sup>6</sup> which updated and modernised earlier Regulations from 1994 and 2005.

## The EESC’s position

To remain competitive in a globalised economy, the European Union needs a coherent and comprehensive EU Aviation Strategy. In the view of the EESC, the starting point for such a strategy should be the fact that the economies of numerous countries outside the EU have grown, which has promoted aviation as a facilitator of such growth. An EU-wide aviation strategy should therefore be based upon three pillars.

First, unnecessary burdens, which undermine the aviation value network, must be reduced. The annual cost of inefficient airspace infrastructure management is estimated by the Commission at EUR 5 billion, and causes unnecessary delays and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Innovation and digitalisation will facilitate the transition to less costly and more efficient air and ground infrastructure management, thus enhancing the competitiveness of European airlines, of European airports as end destinations and hubs, and the prosperity of European regions. This can be achieved without undermining safety or labour standards.

Secondly, the EESC believes that Europe’s international competitiveness can benefit from establishing a global consensus on sustainability. In this respect, several initiatives taken previously can form the foundations for the future. The EU-US Open Aviation Area, for example, has the potential to ensure that the principles of fair competition can be secured. Given the growth of markets

1. Disclaimer: This position paper is based on the EESC draft opinion approved by the relevant section and does not take account of any further amendments introduced at the plenary session.  
2. [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/single\\_european\\_sky/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/single_european_sky/index_en.htm)  
3. [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/airports/doc/2011-airport-package-communication\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/airports/doc/2011-airport-package-communication_en.pdf)  
4. <https://www.easa.europa.eu/>  
5. <https://www.eurocontrol.int/>  
6. [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0628\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0628(01)&from=EN)

in South-East Asia, it is vital for the European aviation network to continue close and constructive cooperation between the EU and ASEAN.

Finally, such an integrated policy must be based upon and reflect the values of European citizens and businesses.

## EESC recommendations

In developing this strategy, the EESC wants the Commission to focus on fostering the economic benefits that aviation creates while ensuring it is compatible with the social and environmental values that characterise Europe. The strategy must be developed on the basis of strong social dialogue. The EESC has identified six key drivers of competitiveness that the strategy should support, three of which are paramount: safety, innovation and sustainability.

In terms of safety, the EASA's role as the central agency for safety management, the certification of aviation products and supervision of approved organisations and EU Member States should be strengthened. The agency should also be able to coordinate with all stakeholders in order to improve safety standards.

The EESC is convinced that more must be done to underline Europe's strengths as a highly attractive economic region, a centre of innovation, a region linked by shared values of social security, social dialogue, safety, security, passenger rights and therefore sustainable competitiveness. An EU aviation policy should seek to achieve a buy-in from all stakeholders for such principles and jointly, in a concerted and coordinated comprehensive action plan, negotiate with non-EU partners on the basis of these principles.

When addressing policy issues, the European Commission must bear in mind that environmental issues are global by nature. If market-based measures are to be meaningful globally, then the level of fees and charges must be seen in a global context as an indicator of the external costs facing various operators.

By working together politically, Europe can achieve greater intermodality, better connectivity and a more efficient use of regional airports<sup>7</sup>. Thus, Europe will be able to compete on the global stage and ensure that current EU provisions are properly implemented. Legally, the strategy will drive regulatory proposals that involve all stakeholders and contribute to the development and implementation of a robust regulatory framework. Economically, a coherent aviation policy will increase sector efficiency and competitiveness both within Europe and internationally, and help to drive economic prosperity and growth across Europe.

Finally, the EU must improve the governance of its aviation. The EESC believes there is too much confusion created by various levels of authority and responsibility. The European Commission's political responsibility and leadership must be endorsed by the EU Member States. To facilitate this, the Commission should work to streamline and clarify its governance over the aviation sector.

***“The strategy to be developed must be based upon a sensible social dialogue. Several provisions exist at national level, which should be implemented to secure social and labour conditions and prevent distortions to competition through flags of convenience.”***

**Jacek Krawczyk**, rapporteur for the EESC Opinion on an Integrated EU Aviation Policy

## Further information

**EESC Opinion:** <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-opinions.35317>

**Single European Sky:** [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/single\\_european\\_sky/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/single_european_sky/index_en.htm)

**2011 Airport Package:** [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/airports/doc/2011-airport-package-communication\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/airports/doc/2011-airport-package-communication_en.pdf)

**February 2014 Review of State Aid Rules:** [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0628\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0628(01)&from=EN)

**European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA):** <https://www.easa.europa.eu/>

<sup>7</sup> See recommendations of EESC Opinion on Airport Capacity TEN/552-EESC-2014-04093-00-00-AC-TRA (EN) 2/10