

Press Release

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ERA conference unites aviation leaders in Berlin for strategic dialogue

- Distinguished industry leaders, including speakers from the European Commission, EUROCONTROL and EASA join ERA's major conference and address the most pressing aviation challenges.

Aviation leaders from ERA's diverse range of membership businesses have gathered for ERA's first major event of the year, engaging in robust discussions over two days on critical topics such as competition, financing the green transition and resource scarcity.

Over 250 prominent industry executives from more than 140 businesses, including leaders from 38 European airlines, have participated in the conference, leveraging their expertise to address the most pressing issues facing the regional aviation sector.

Addressing the topic of competition raised the question of whether all regional airlines can thrive in Europe's changing aviation landscape. The consensus was that competition is generally positive but that there is a need to balance competition with connectivity. Discussions addressed ongoing challenges, including mergers and the closure of regional airports due to economic issues. This sparked debate about the need to prioritise operational aid to maintain regional connectivity as Henrik Mørch, Director, DG COMP, European Commission emphasised the importance of feedback from regional airlines to guide revisions to State Aid rules in the aviation sector.

Mørch also stressed the importance of flexibility in overcoming challenges, stating: "In a landscape of fierce competition, the key to success lies in strategic resilience and adaptability. Embracing change and innovation will pave the way for sustained growth in the regional aviation industry."

Attention turned to focus on how the green revolution can be funded, with emphasis on the finance required to achieve net-zero emissions. The urgent need for short-term funding was underscored, citing predictions from the EU that estimates the cost of reaching net zero by 2050 will be €800bn. Consensus existed that regional aviation must address all three pillars of the net-zero roadmap: adopting new technologies, Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and operational measures, and speakers highlighted that, though confidence in financing new technologies is high, there remains a need for smart market measures to facilitate the business case for sustainable aircraft.

Anne-Bart Tieleman, CEO of lessor TrueNoord, discussed the critical challenge of financing the green transition, stating: "As we navigate the accelerating push to decarbonise our industry, we are presented with a significant opportunity for European aviation. Investing in technological research, exploring new propulsion systems and advancing Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) will be crucial. Europe has the chance to lead in this field by building a comprehensive sustainable aviation fuel industry. To achieve this, EU and European governments must support funding for production capability. It's time for Europe to establish a leading SAF industry."

* Founded in 1980, European Regions Airline Association (ERA) is a non-profit trade association representing over 55 airlines plus around 150 other companies involved in European air transport, and is the only association that bring together the entire spectrum of companies involved in European aviation. The association supports and defends the airline industry in providing safe, efficient and sustainable air connectivity to all regions of Europe. By lobbying European regulatory bodies on policy matters, ERA promotes and protects social responsibility, environmental sustainability and the development of regional economies and local communities.

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Maria Rueda, Strategy and Safety Management Director at EASA, emphasised that effective communication is paramount to ensure the highest safety standards, especially within the dynamic realm of regional aviation and added: “Within Europe, there is increasing focus on sustainability and technology, presenting exciting opportunities to forge alliances and cross-organisational engagement. ERA events offer a wonderful opportunity to foster synergy between stakeholders.”

In addition to addressing these critical topics, a fireside chat addressed resource scarcity and considered the pressing labour shortages and parts constraints facing regional airlines as well as the need for the regional industry to remain creative in adapting to the evolving challenges. It was agreed that while the sector could be perceived to be at the bottom of the aviation food chain, it remains an essential component of the aviation ecosystem and offers the next generation of pilots, aviation engineers and operators a myriad of benefits that the bigger players cannot. Arguably there exists a need to better communicate these benefits, as well as the opportunities they offer, in order to foster cultivate understanding, attract young, skilled talent and foster sustainability.

Montserrat Barriga, ERA’s Director General closed the event by remarking: “Throughout this conference, we’ve heard a resounding call for strategic resilience and adaptability, acknowledging the fierce competition we face. We have a shared understanding that challenges like resource scarcity present opportunities for innovation and transformation. Urgency surrounds the green transition, emphasising the need to invest in technology and SAF to lead Europe towards a sustainable future. Effective communication is highlighted as vital for fostering alliances and engagement, especially in ensuring safety standards and sustainability.

“ERA events serve as a platform for essential strategic dialogue, bringing together leaders who recognise the pivotal role of regional aviation in Europe’s transportation landscape. As we confront challenges like human capital shortages and environmental pressures, our collective focus on regional connectivity and industry-wide concerns remains paramount. Inspired by the insights shared, here in Berlin, we are poised to cultivate a thriving aviation ecosystem, once characterised by innovation, sustainability and collaboration.”

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