

## Information

27 April 2010

### **EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES NEED EXTRAORDINARY REMEDIES AEA welcomes EU leadership to resolve aviation crisis**

The Association of European Airlines, which brings together Europe's most important network airlines, has applauded the decision of the European Commission to respond decisively to the effective one-week grounding of the European air transport sector in the aftermath of the Icelandic volcanic eruption.

Compressed into a remarkably short timeframe, a Task Force involving three EU Commissioners and top-level EU officials has delivered a comprehensive report on the devastating impact which the closure of airspace had on the aviation sector, as well as on necessary avenues of assistance and relief connected to the losses suffered by the industry.

Said AEA Secretary General Ulrich Schulte-Strathaus: *"In its Report, the Commission recognised the importance of aviation for Europe and its citizens. The Commission identified, as a consequence of the lessons learned during the past week, short term measures that are required to re-establish a functional aviation sector. But Commissioner Kallas also pointed to the structural reforms which must now be accelerated."*

Overriding concern during the phase of intense volcanic eruptions in Iceland had been to maintain Europe's high safety standards. *"Safety is the prerogative of national administrations, the EU institutions and certainly the airline industry"* agreed Mr. Schulte-Strathaus. *"But it has become clear that the basis for taking the decisions to close airspace, as well as the process itself, is in dire need of improvement. We are pleased to note that, as a matter of urgency and importance, practical measures will be put in place to ensure that any future incidents of this kind will be handled in a much more efficient and less disruptive manner".*

The Commission has signalled its agreement in principle that a mechanism should be devised that allows industry stakeholders, deprived of their livelihood for a period of several days, to seek damage compensation whilst avoiding competitive distortions. It furthermore intends to outline in a separate document how compensation claims should be settled by Member States without distorting competition. *"We welcome such clarification of a framework to determine the justification of compensation claims. The AEA airlines will not seek state aids as a result of this crisis. But in this case, the entire European airline sector was effectively forced to close down as a result of an airspace closure"*, said the AEA Secretary General.

- Adria Airways
- Aegean Airlines
- Aer Lingus
- AeroSvit
- airBaltic
- Air France
- Air Malta
- Alitalia
- Austrian
- bmi
- British Airways
- brussels airlines
- Cargolux
- Croatia Airlines
- Cyprus Airways
- Czech Airlines
- DHL
- Finnair
- Iberia
- Icelandair
- Jat Airways
- KLM
- LOT
- Lufthansa
- Luxair
- Malev
- Montenegro Airlines
- Olympic Air
- SAS Scandinavian Airlines
- SWISS
- TAP Portugal
- TAROM
- TNT Airways
- Turkish Airlines
- Ukraine International Airlines
- Virgin Atlantic Airways

The AEA airlines, he said, had deployed a broad range of measures to help their displaced passengers over the last two weeks. *“The unprecedented scale of the closure of airspace resulted in a very high level of disruption and inconvenience to passengers ”*, said Ulrich Schulte-Strathaus, *“and airlines have stretched their capabilities to the limit in helping to minimise the impact. The AEA airlines which complied with the passenger rights legislation should not be disadvantaged against those which did not. The Commission is realistic in advising that national authorities may take the practical difficulties of the airlines during the crisis into account when determining the applicability of the passenger rights during this crisis.”*

Looking towards the future, a recommendation of the Task Force report is to establish an Aviation Platform which will ensure that key reforms of the airline industry are accelerated and their impact monitored. AEA now calls upon the Member States to endorse the thrust of this Report at their forthcoming meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> May. *“The Commission has set the stage for all stakeholders to contribute to an accelerated reform of the European aviation system. We are prepared to support all EU institutions in establishing urgently needed measures to improve risk management, settling justified compensation claims without distortion to competition, as well as promoting structural reforms.”*

For further information, please contact:

David Henderson

Manager Information

Phone : +32(0) 2 639 89 72

Email: [david.henderson@aea.be](mailto:david.henderson@aea.be)

[www.aea.be](http://www.aea.be)

Note to the Editor: The Association of European Airlines (AEA) brings together 36 European established scheduled network carriers. These collectively carry 347 million passengers and 6 million tonnes of cargo each year, operating 2,160 aircraft serving 662 destinations in 162 countries with 11,400 flights a day. They provide around 385,000 jobs directly, and generate a total turnover of €70 billion