

## Information

23 June 2010

### EUROPE'S AIRLINES EXPECT TRANSPORT MINISTERS TO ACT ON VOLCANIC ASH

#### Thursday's Transport Council must take crucial decisions, says AEA

European Transport Ministers, meeting in Brussels on Thursday, must not let slip the opportunity to limit disruption in the event of further volcanic events, says the Association of European Airlines. The faulty processes which led to the prolonged shut-down of most of European aviation in April, with sporadic further restrictions into May, must not be allowed to re-occur, said AEA.

The Eyjafjallajökull eruption, while spectacular, had repercussions far out of proportion to the limited threat posed to aircraft. *"The dispersion and dissipation of the ash was calculated by theoretical modelling"*, said AEA Secretary General Ulrich Schulte-Strathaus, *"but since nobody knew how much atmospheric ash was being ejected by the volcano in the first place, the models were useless and the decisions taken were disastrously flawed"*.

AEA has formulated a 'New European Approach' to ash-cloud management which it has circulated to all the EU Transport Ministers as well as other relevant institutions and agencies: the Commission, the European Aviation Safety Agency and Eurocontrol. It argues for the responsibility for operational decisions to reside with those who have the expertise and experience of dealing with the avoidance of risk in their day-to-day business – the airlines and their pilots. This is standard practice in other areas of the world, where volcanic activity may not be as uncommon as it is in Northwest Europe. *"We earnestly hope that the Council will give this project its fullest support"*, said Mr Schulte-Strathaus. *"Rigid bureaucracy is not the way to deal with such situations. Our customers require an absolute level of safety, of course, and they also require the flexibility that allows us to deliver the service they expect of us"*.

The April/May eruption cost AEA airlines approximately €1.2 billion, a figure which was greatly inflated by unnecessary restrictions on flying imposed by national authorities, and by passenger compensation rules which were wholly inappropriate to a Europe-wide curtailment of operations for an extended period. *"Virtually all airlines flying in European airspace were affected by these decisions, and many were unable to conduct any business at all for a period of several days"*, said the AEA Secretary General. *"We urgently seek guidance from the Transport Ministers as to how airlines may seek restitution for the losses they have suffered"*.

- 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 uncoordinated operating restrictions in European airspace during the eruption drew an undertaking from the European Commission to accelerate the Single European Sky process to reform air traffic management in Europe. “*The Transport Council will hopefully endorse this promise*”, said Ulrich Schulte-Strathaus, “*and dispel any concerns that the airlines may have that the EU Member States are less than fully committed to their responsibilities under the Single Sky programme*”.

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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