

Working together to keep Europe at the forefront of international aviation

Henrik Hololei, Head of Cabinet for Vice-President Siim Kallas
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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the opportunity today of addressing so many presidents and directors-general from the world of international aviation. I would like to thank the European Civil Aviation Conference for inviting me to your 33rd plenary session here in Strasbourg - it is indeed an honour.

I am sure you do not need me to tell you that these are tough times for European aviation, despite the recent glimmers of hope for our economy.

It is a tremendous tribute to the resilience of the aviation industry, its ability and willingness to adapt to a changing environment, that aviation has fought through a decade of ups and downs – and remains a success story for Europe.

As regulators – the civil aviation directors-general here today as well as the European Commission – we all have a role to play. The benefits of business-friendly projects cannot come too soon for the aviation industry. Europe needs to push forward with initiatives which are good for aviation as a whole and which will help to preserve the European Union as a global aviation hub. At the same time, we need to ensure that EU industry – particularly aeronautics – stays competitive in the world marketplace.

When the European economy picks up again, the existing capacity limitations in our skies will become more of a barrier to growth – given that demand for air travel and cargo is directly linked to economic activity.

This is why the Single European Sky project being advanced by the European Commission is so vital. It qualifies on every count, and particularly in terms of tackling the 'capacity crunch' in our skies that threatens to undermine the sector. With its technology arm SESAR, it will also give a huge boost to European research and development.

It is a tremendous example of where Europe can make a huge difference to aviation, business and citizens. It is a project about putting Europe at the forefront of aviation, the most dynamic and advanced mode of transport, and securing its position as a world leader.

We need such regulator-driven initiatives, backed by our Member States – represented here today by the directors-general – to prepare European aviation to tackle future challenges, like capacity. Frankly, there is no time to lose: we cannot afford to wait for years to make the progress that is urgently needed.

Accelerated implementation of the Single European Sky is crucial for the competitiveness, growth and sustainability of Europe's entire air transport system. This is a hugely important project where ECAC is uniquely placed to assist, develop and enhance pan-European aviation.

ECAC covers the widest grouping of Member States of any European organisation dealing with civil aviation. Its long-established expertise in aviation matters, its 44-country membership embracing a string of non-EU countries, its strategic priorities of safety, security and the environment – chiming very clearly with EU policy – all make it an integral part of the global air transport family.

Europeans today enjoy safe trouble-free air travel thanks to the co-operation between countries made possible by ECAC's existence. Most importantly, it is ECAC's ability to act as a forum that makes it so valuable, allowing coordination of different approaches to key projects like the Single Sky, where we all benefit.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To have the top aviation officials of ECAC's 44 Member States discussing and perhaps taking more 'ownership' of such aspects of EU policy could make a real difference in bringing work on the various strands of the project together – so that the Single European Sky can be delivered in full and on time.

This is precisely the kind of discussion arena that we lack at the moment in the European Union. I think we could perhaps now take ECAC's own excellent example to boost work on the Single Sky by establishing more of a coordinating role and forum for EU Member State directors-general of aviation.

At the European Commission, we are unable to achieve this alone. For industry, business and citizens to reap the benefits of the Single Sky, we first need to be empowered with the full support of Member States. Of course, once this is working smoothly, the non-EU members of ECAC – several of which are already part of Europe's common aviation area – will enjoy the same benefits.

As you know, delivering the Single European Sky is a particular priority for Vice-President Kallas during his mandate as European transport commissioner. There have been some worrying signs of delay, with the functional airspace blocks, for example. It is one of the EU's most ambitious transport policies and must not be allowed to fail.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although the EU is developing a single aviation market, not all European countries are party to this. It is one of ECAC's special assets that it can integrate policies – to alleviate airspace congestion and reduce air traffic delays, for example – on a wider geographical basis than other organisations can achieve.

So ECAC's value should not be underestimated, particularly with its facility for aligning and linking its EU and non-EU member countries. As an 'international bridge', it also coordinates their participation in the work of international bodies dealing with aviation – ICAO, Eurocontrol, and of course, the EU institutions.

I am happy with the solid cooperation between the EU, ECAC and other partners such as Eurocontrol in different areas. The European Union is also 100% committed to the ICAO process, where we rely on ECAC's support and input – as an EU or an ECAC family member, or indeed both - in the preparatory process for the next ICAO Assembly. This is how we can benefit from ECAC's wide scope and be able to speak with a single voice on behalf of ECAC's 44 Contracting States.

Our aviation director Matthew Baldwin will be covering these issues in more detail later, as well as updating you on our airports package where we have got off to a flying start. EU transport ministers have reached two general approaches on the groundhandling and noise proposals. Work on slots has just started and the Cypriot Presidency aims to reach an agreement by the end of the year.

ECAC's non-EU member countries – Turkey, Ukraine and countries further east such as Georgia and Azerbaijan – are part of a family whose members are all equal. These countries are either fully integrated, or will be, into the European Common Aviation Area as it continues to expand. The latest country to become a full aviation partner with the EU was ECAC member Moldova, just a few weeks ago.

This huge integrated and open aviation market, based on common rules, has clear benefits for everyone, by providing better business conditions. Market opening and regulatory convergence are essential for promoting fair and open competition, along with EU safety, security, environmental and other standards.

In turn, this helps the future development of the overall European aviation industry by providing a coherent regulatory framework for an enlarged marketplace. And in addition, we all gain from high levels of aviation safety and security across a wider European region. I believe that these are also the aims and objectives of ECAC.

On aviation security, for example, we are hoping to raise cooperation between ECAC and the Commission to a new level by agreeing a Memorandum of Cooperation in the not too distant future. This would allow each side to make best use of the other's expertise by making our efforts complementary, and mutually reinforcing each other in our respective areas of competence.

I would warmly welcome the support of the directors-general for this initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The glass is more than half-full. ECAC already does some excellent work – I very much appreciate the good cooperation that we have in preparing a solid and coherent European standpoint within ICAO, for example. This allows Europe to present a very powerful policy message to the rest of the aviation world.

But I believe that together, there is even more that we can do to build on our successful relationship of cooperation.

ECAC should do what it can to help its non-EU members to become fully-fledged members of the European Common Aviation Area, by promoting EU standards and policy. This is how we can build a truly pan-European aviation market. I would also invite its directors-general to assume more 'ownership' of the positives being offered by the EU.

And I mentioned earlier how the ECAC civil aviation directors-general representing EU countries could be established into more of a forum to help accelerate progress with the Single European Sky.

After all, we are all working towards the same objective – to develop an air transport system for Europe which is safe, efficient and sustainable. A high quality of service for passengers; a competitive and open business environment to keep Europe's aviation industry at the global forefront.

Thank you for your attention.