

Press release

For immediate release

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Commission guidelines urgently needed on government aid to airports

Brussels, 3 February 2004: The European Commission today announced its decision concerning incentives granted to Ryanair by Brussels South - Charleroi Airport and the Walloon Regional government in Belgium. However, despite certain clarifications the Commission failed to guarantee the subsequent guidelines that are essential to serve as a transparent framework for all future government-funded incentives to attract low-fares airlines.

Philippe Hamon, Director General, ACI EUROPE: "This decision will have an impact on all airports, whether publicly or privately owned, that benefit from publicly-funded incentives to attract airlines. However, unless the European Commission immediately produces clear guidelines that can form the basis of a transparent framework for airline agreements with regional airports – this legal uncertainty will continue and the consumer will suffer."

As long as public money is being used as an incentive for a carrier to fly to a certain region, state aid rules must be adhered to and the ownership structure of the airport concerned is of little or no relevance. Today's decision offered some insight into the European Commission's thinking on government aid to develop regional airports with respect to the duration of the commercial incentives (5 years) and the amount of start up-costs (50%) that can be incurred. Yet, the details discussed today fall well short of coherent guidelines – without which airport operators and airlines will continue to struggle in their interpretation of EU state aid rules.

Philippe Hamon, Director General, ACI EUROPE: "Europe's airports call on the European Commission to provide immediately a detailed framework for airline agreements covering the key areas of transparency, duration and exclusivity. Airports across Europe must be able to compete on a level playing field. Until these guidelines are published, we shall continue to suffer the numerous legal challenges currently underway regarding public money being used as an incentive for a carrier to fly to a certain region."

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Airports Council International (ACI) is the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over 450 airports in 45 European countries. Member airports handle 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe, welcoming over a billion passengers each year.