10 point plan

for the Belgian aviation industry

JOINT MEMORANDUM 2024 BELGIAN ELECTIONS

AirCargoBelgium · AOC Brussels · BAR Belgium · bata belgian air transport association

1 Recognise aviation as a global sector of great social importance

According to the National Bank of Belgium, air transport and airport activities generated around 6 billion euros in direct and indirect added value in 2015, today accounting for about **2%** of Belgium's **GDP**. Within this context, Brussels Airport is the **second most important economic growth engine** in Belgium, accounting for **24,000 direct** and **40,000 indirect jobs**. It is therefore important that legislation recognises and strengthens the economic and social role that the aviation industry plays for the country.

2 A level playing field for the Belgian aviation sector

As the aviation sector is a **global industry**, legislation that would only apply in Belgium should be avoided. Additional thresholds such as a national kerosine tax, boarding fees, national SAF quotas, discriminatory levies, etc. affect the competitiveness of the Belgian aviation sector without demonstrable social benefits. Our governments must **align** national and European **legislation with global standards** that safeguard the **competitiveness** of Belgian airlines. "Gold plating" should be avoided at all costs. To avoid overlegislation and administrative burdens, regulatory authorities should take care to draft new legislation only when really necessary and that it does not jeopardise the competitiveness of the Belgian aviation sector.

3 Strict application of the balanced approach

When determining a future legal framework for Brussels Airport, attention must obviously be paid to the approach to noise nuisance. What is crucial here is that the **balanced approach** as set out in European Regulation 598/2014 is strictly applied. This includes the definition of an objective (Flemish competence), the identification of all possible noise abatement measures (Flemish & federal competence), the evaluation of these measures in a socio-economic analysis (Flemish & federal competence) and adequate consultation with stakeholders. Importantly, the regulation also clearly stipulates that new **operational restrictions** should be considered as a **last resort**: priority should therefore be given to measures relating to fleet renewal, land-use planning and the adaptation of operational procedures (including establishment of flight paths).

4 A stable and coherent legal framework for Brussels Airport

The Belgian aviation sector is asking for a **stable** and **future-oriented legal framework**. Such legal framework should certainly address, but not be limited to:

- an **inter-federal agreement** on **flight paths**
- the Runway Preferential System (**PRS**),
- the (new) **wind standards** and measures to tackle aviation **noise**.

In any case, all relevant federal and regional legislation must be well aligned. All this requires a cooperation agreement and a Federal Aviation Law.

5 Incentives to accelerate sustainability

Belgian airlines are ready to take on the task of becoming more sustainable, but must be supported in doing so. The usage of Sustainable Aviation Fuels (**SAF**) should be **encouraged** and the **price difference** with conventional aviation fuels should be **reduced**. The various governments should strive to implement enabling measures and incentives, at least to keep pace with other EU member states.

6 Permanently securing 16,000 night slots at Brussels Airport

The number of night flight slots at Brussels Airport is limited to 16,000, of which a maximum of 5,000 departures. This number of night slots is almost completely filled. The **Belgian aviation** sector wishes to **grow** at Brussels Airport **without additional night flights**. Growth at night will be achieved through **efficiency gains**, usually by exchanging an aircraft with a smaller capacity for one with a larger capacity. As fleet renewal for cargo aircraft focuses mainly on the larger aircraft, capacity increases will also lead to a decrease in noise impact. To offer prospects for this sustainable growth and safeguard the connectivity Belgium, the **16,000 night slots must be maintained**.

7 Operational restrictions must be focused to address laggards

Operational restrictions should be a last resort, as required by the EU Regulation on the Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise. When **operational restrictions** are absolutely necessary, they should **focus on** addressing **pertinent laggards** and take into account market realities for all economic players. Cargo aircraft are often one generation behind passenger aircraft. This is due to the fact that demand for cargo aircraft is a lot lower than for passenger aircraft. Manufacturers therefore do not develop cargo versions of every model. Unrealistic restrictions lead to wealth destruction and possibly a negative impact on employment, and certainly not to quieter aircraft, which benefits no one. In any case, operational restrictions should also **take into account how an aircraft is operated** i.o. only being based on theoretical worst-case scenarios.

8 Strategic land-use planning

Once flight paths have been defined and agreed, policymakers should be cautious about permitting new residential development in the areas most affected by aircraft noise (e.g. just below departure routes where aircraft pass at lower altitudes). Where **private housing** is already present, the government should **encourage** investment in **noise insulation**. It is very difficult for potential investors or tenants to inform themselves objectively about actual noise pollution. Many new residents also indicate that living close to the airport is more difficult for them than intially expected. By introducing a new '**noise certificate**' with information on Lden/Lnight noise levels, new residents can make an informed decision in advance.

9 Better rail connectivity for Brussels Airport and regional airports

Brussels Airport needs a **high-speed rail link** to encourage more sustainable travel. High-speed rail would strengthen the competitiveness of Brussels Airport and reduce the need for short-haul flights. At the same time, a solution must be found for the ever-increasing "**Diabolo**" **surcharge**, which puts a brake on train traffic to and from the airport. **Accessibility** of Brussels Airport and the regional airports of Liège, Ostend and Antwerp **by public transport**, both for passengers and employees should also be **improved**, especially in the early morning and late evening.

10 Efficient and seamless border control

Passengers arriving at Brussels Airport are often confronted with **long queues** at peak times. Technological developments (e.g. **automatic gates** of the latest generation) are not yet sufficiently implemented. At the same time, the implementation of **EES** and **ETIAS** should also be adequately **prepared** at the Belgian level. The **introduction** of **US Pre-Clearance** would provide a competitive advantage for Brussels Airport.