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Open call to the European Commission: make Europe the home of zero-emission and hybrid-powered aircraft

European companies, many of them innovative new entrants to the market, are developing the next generation of disruptive aircraft technologies, notably zero-emissions and hybrid-powered aircraft (ZEHA). These innovations can get us closer to decarbonised flying and could help secure European aviation's competitiveness and technological leadership for decades to come. Thanks to their higher efficiency, and their use of domestic European renewable electricity and green hydrogen, these planes are also a tool to secure our energy independence.

To make sure that these companies succeed and new ones emerge, the EU should integrate a comprehensive framework to support research and development (R&D), industrialisation and market creation for new, disruptive aircraft technologies into its upcoming Aviation Strategy. This should include targeted measures in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and relevant aviation legislation.

First, public support of aircraft R&D should focus on high-risk, high-reward novel propulsion technologies, and aircraft architectures which will bring larger efficiency gains than incremental improvements of legacy technologies from incumbent manufacturers. The EU should ringfence a part of R&D funds under the MFF's 10th Framework Programme (FP10) for new entrants, whose business model rests on making new technologies reach the market. This should be complemented by stronger partnerships between these smaller innovative players and larger incumbent companies, to help scale new technologies effectively.

The EU should also address the industrialisation stage under the next MFF. Support from the European Competitiveness Fund, using instruments to leverage private investments, will be critical to move new technologies from lab to market. This should support both aircraft manufacturers and their European suppliers of sub-systems and components. In parallel, EASA should have the resources needed to certify new propulsion technologies safely and timely.

Finally, to create a truly coherent strategy, the EU should go beyond funding, using aviation legislation, outlined below, to boost the market uptake of ZEHA.

On airport legislation, the European Commission should amend the Slot Regulation to create a green priority within the slot pool for zero-emission and hybrid-powered aircraft at suitable airports. The Ground Handling Directive should ensure fair and transparent access to electric

charging and hydrogen refuelling services, while preserving competition in airport energy supply so that clean aircraft operations can remain economically viable. Finally, the Airport Charges Directive should be updated to require airports within its scope to apply environmental modulation of airport charges, taking into account CO₂, NO_x and noise. Similarly, the European Commission should revise Air Navigation Charges to include environmental modulation as well.

Regarding the alternative fuels infrastructure regulation (AFIR), Member States should identify in National Policy Frameworks the airports that will host electric aircraft, to plan the appropriate deployment of electric charging and related energy upgrades, and prepare for future hydrogen refueling infrastructure at strategic airports. The alternative fuels infrastructure facility (AFIF) should also be extended for the 2026-2027 period.

To ensure the competitiveness of these clean, European-made aircraft, the EU Commission should create a support mechanism to bridge the potential increase in operational costs in the first years of deployment for ZE and hybrid aircraft. The mechanism could be integrated under ReFuelEU, following a similar principle to the electricity credits used for electric vehicles in the Renewable Energy Directive. Alternatively, they could be introduced in the EU Emission Trading System (ETS), as an extension of the FEETS SAF support scheme.

The EU Commission should modify the Air Services Regulation to strengthen the environmental criteria in tenders for Public Service Obligation (PSO) routes, and cap progressively the CO₂ intensity of shorter flight routes once ZE and hybrid planes enter into service. Member States should also explore and implement dedicated "green PSOs" specifically tailored for ZEHA in suitable routes.

A stronger application of the polluter pays principle is also needed in aviation. Fossil jet fuel remains too cheap compared with its climate impact, weakening the business case for cleaner alternatives, including ZEHA and e-SAF. A stronger price signal should help close this gap, with part of the revenues reinvested into aviation decarbonisation, including through instruments such as the Innovation Fund, which have already supported ZEHA.

We urge the European Commission and Member States to act decisively. With the proposed framework, the EU would create a supporting ecosystem so that the future of flying is made in Europe.

Sincerely,

Signatories

