



PRESS RELEASE

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Volcanic Ash Clouds: Mixing Commercial and Safety Decisions Risks Lives

Commercial Aviation is the safest form of transport – but only because for decades we have separated commercial and safety decisions. ECA, which represents the nearly 39,000 Professional Flight Crew from 38 European countries who are asked to deliver this safe transport system, call on safety authorities to put safety before commercial considerations.

ECA supports the "safety first" stance adopted by European and National airspace authorities, following carefully considered ICAO guidelines on restricting flights through volcanic ash clouds. Our members have many firsthand experiences of the extremely abrasive and clogging effects of such clouds. Operational decisions should be based on the strong safety culture developed over many decades in our industry, whereas financial problems should be addressed with financial solutions – never should the two be mixed.

- All operational decisions should be 'safety first'.
- More data is needed on where the volcanic matter poses a threat and where it has sufficiently dispersed. However, commercial aircraft should not be used as test aircraft and test programmes should consist of comprehensive and carefully planned trials. One aircraft, on one route, during the 'day only' proves little.
- If after careful consideration, safety authorities have concluded certain airspace poses no further threat, the final decision passes through the airline to the pilot of the particular flight – who must be given as much clear information as is available to make the final decision to fly. Pilots have always been, and always will be, best placed to protect the safety of our passengers, crew and aircraft.

ECA also calls on the European Authorities to recognise the extraordinary circumstances the industry in Europe is experiencing. European level solutions are needed to address the huge financial burdens which this natural event has placed on our industry, thereby also avoiding unbalanced subsidy and commercial advantage. Temporary absence of air transport has demonstrated that aviation is crucial to our society's smooth functioning, and therefore the EU must allow for swift financial relief to be provided.

Operational decisions require a 'safety first' approach and *separately*, financial crises require a financial solution. ECA supports the European Authorities in *separately* addressing both the risks to lives and to the financial survival of our sector.

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