

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002096/26
to the Commission
Sophia Kircher (PPE)
(20 May 2026)**

Subject: Measures supporting regional airports in the EU

Regional airports form an essential part of our EU-wide transport infrastructure. They ensure international connectivity for rural regions, thus boosting their economic development and competitiveness. They also serve as feeder airports serving major international aviation hubs. They are, meanwhile, facing significant challenges, notably limited profitability, high investment- and operating costs for infrastructure, the trend towards ever-larger aircraft, structural dependence on major network carriers and limited opportunities for code-sharing and interline agreements.

1. What specific policy and financial measures is the Commission pursuing to ensure that the EU's rural regions remain accessible via regional airports in the long term?
2. How is the new EU aviation strategy intended to take account of the structural challenges and needs of regional airports, particularly with regard to their weaker position vis-à-vis major network carriers in terms of access to code-sharing and interline agreements?
3. How does the Commission intend to ensure that the EU's decarbonisation targets for aviation, particularly those pertaining to the EU Emissions Trading System or sustainable aviation fuel quotas, do not undermine the EU aviation sector's competitiveness?

Submitted: 20.5.2026

**Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas on behalf of the European Commission
(3 August 2026)**

1. The EU law allows Member States to support regional airports with investment and operating state aid and to help new connections with start-up aid ⁽¹⁾. Member States may also impose a public service obligation (PSO) for scheduled air services between an airport serving a peripheral or development region and other EU airports ⁽²⁾. They can also subsidise air tickets for residents of remote and outermost regions ⁽³⁾. Several EU instruments offer targeted funding support to airports, e.g., for testing innovative solutions, implementing the green transition, or fostering territorial cohesion, in particular the framework Programmes on research and innovation, the Connecting Europe Facility, the InvestEU programme, the Emissions Trading System (ETS) Innovation Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund.
2. The upcoming Aviation Strategy will highlight the importance of regional airport connectivity, in line with the Fitness Check of airport legislation, the Air Services Regulation ⁽⁴⁾, and revised state aid guidelines. While code-sharing and interlining are airline business decisions, the strategy will aim to support robust flight connections from regional airports. This will allow airlines to exercise their commercial freedom to engage in these agreements within the wider network.
3. The Commission is aware of the concerns raised by the industry about the potential impact of sustainable aviation fuel mandates or ETS on EU carriers' competitiveness. The Commission is monitoring evidence on business leakage risks. It will consider this in whether and how to design measures addressing identified distortions, consistently with international obligations and the EU's broader climate and competitiveness agenda.

⁽¹⁾ Communication from the Commission — Guidelines on state aid to airports and airlines, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52014XC0404%2801%29>.

⁽²⁾ Art. 16 of Regulation (EC) No 1008/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 September 2008 on common rules for the operation of air services in the Community, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2008/1008/oj/eng>.

⁽³⁾ Article 51 of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:02014R0651-20230701>.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2008/1008/oj/eng>.