

Future Flight

In spite of environmental and social issues, the growth of the aviation industry continues unabated. For land-locked Switzerland it is vital: as a hub of business and tourism, Switzerland needs fast, convenient and affordable air connections. The Swiss Aviation Congress, which will be held this year at the EuroAirport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg, is in its second edition and has already established itself as an important business platform.

Aviation is an indispensable sector of the world economy. In Switzerland alone, 176,000 jobs and a value creation of CHF 26 billion depend on this industry. And there is growth in sight. Accessibility is absolutely necessary for efficient production and the successful international marketing of goods, services and the country itself. The job of the political sector is to provide the industry with the best possible framework to ensure that the existing growth potential can be properly exploited using efficient and environmentally friendly structures. The report by the Federal Council on aviation policy in Switzerland dating to 2004 is the basis for shaping legislation in Switzerland. But while the economic benefits are indisputable, there are also a number of risks and challenges that the industry is facing and will continue facing in the future.

Troubled airways

While the political sector seems aware of the economic benefits of aviation, down on the ground there are many in the country who are not quite as satisfied with the course charted by the industry. Strict environmental regulations are already in place, for example, but various initiatives in the canton of Zurich have

been launched to put limits on Kloten's growth. Most notable of these is the so-called "Plafonierungsinitiative," the "ceiling initiative" aimed at limiting the number of starts and landings at Zurich's airport and particularly the airport opening hours. A plebiscite on the matter will be held in November. Should the initiative succeed, say opponents, it could jeopardize Kloten's crucial hub function.

Furthermore, Swiss civil aviation has various competitive disadvantages to contend with on the cost side. As opposed to various European states and the USA, where the costs of security are paid for by government agencies, in Switzerland it's the airlines and the passengers who foot the bill almost exclusively. And because flight security services performed over neighboring territory are not recouped, flight security expenses in Switzerland are amongst the highest in Europe. Furthermore, the training costs for aviation jobs must be paid entirely by personnel and the employer, as opposed to other countries.

Heavy weather

The airlines are also having to deal with resistance on other fronts. The perennial problem of overcapacity continues to push



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down prices for flights, for example. Also, the industry today is in competition for air traffic flows, which are mainly on the USA-Europe-Asia axis. A number of Gulf States are working towards setting up an alternative bridgehead to Europe, however. Dubai, for example, is building an airport with a capacity of 120 million passengers per year. Europe's largest airport, London Heathrow, processes just half that number, 60 million.

The issue of security is also pressing. Implementing an increasingly large number of security measures is not only difficult, but also very costly. The loss of time incurred by the host of security measures has been narrowing the advantage gap that

aviation enjoyed vis-à-vis other modes of transportation, especially on short trips. What is also obvious are the inexplicable asymmetries in the way the various carriers of public transportation handle defense against terrorist or criminal threats.

The second Swiss Aviation Congress will provide an ideal platform to not only explore solutions to this panoply of challenges, but also to increase awareness amongst a broader public of the benefits of aviation and to make a clear political point about the significance of aviation in the Swiss economy. ■

Paul Kurrus, former National Councilor, is President of Aerosuisse, the umbrella association of the Swiss aerospace sector



2. Swiss Aviation Congress

Opening speech (10 a.m.)

Gerold Bühler, President economiesuisse

On the significance of the EuroAirport as a trinational airport for the regions Basel, Alsace and Southwestern Germany

Jürg Rämi, Director EuroAirport Basel
Mulhouse Freiburg

Jean-Marie Bockel, Senator and Mayor,
Mulhouse

Dr. Sven von Ungern-Sternberg,
District President of Freiburg

Dr. Thomas Staehelin, President of the Basel
Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Ralph Lewin, Executive Councilor,
Canton of Basel-Stadt

Panel discussion

on security in aviation (11:15 a.m.)

Prof. Dr. Friedrich Steinhäusler, Institute of
Physics and Biophysics, University of Salzburg

Robert Missen, Deputy Head
of Aviation Security, European Commission
for Transport & Energy

Raymond Cron, Director
of the Federal Office of Civil Aviation (FOCA)

Josef Felder, President
of Swiss International Airports
Association (SIAA)

Dr. Christoph Franz,
Chief Executive Officer,
Swiss International Air Lines Ltd.

SWISS and Lufthansa –

Facing global competition (2 p.m.)

Stefan Lauer, Member of the Executive Board
of Deutsche Lufthansa AG

Aviation's role for Switzerland as a business location (2.30 p.m.)

Doris Leuthard, Federal Councilor