

“Airport expansion - yes, but not in my own backyard”

The ARC Half Yearly Meeting 2010, very successfully hosted by Prague Airport Region, had the theme “How to coexist with your airports and their operational impact”. Participants from more than 20 cities and regions all over Europe had gathered to discuss matters like the importance of having a dialogue with local residents and municipalities affected by the airport in order to find a balance and a good quality of life for the residents.

- Everyone wants service, but no one wants the infrastructure in their own neighbourhood, said speaker Marcel Chládek, deputy governor of Central Bohemia Region and responsible for regional development and European integration.

Mr Chládek stressed the importance of listening to the local representatives and the willingness of the region to be a good partner for the local level.

Jirí Oberfalzer, senator for the Prague West Region, stated the need of balance between the impact of the airport and what people need. People sometimes protest against infrastructure projects around the airports, and public interest could be in conflict with what people want.

- It's true that for example a new runway will create noise, but then there are compensation possibilities through other projects, said Mr Oberfalzer.

The conference made it obvious that noise is the major environmental problem for citizens. It was mentioned that aircraft manufacturers for this reasons are trying to develop more silent machines.

- Everybody says yes to airport expansion but “not in my own backyard”, said the Mayor of Prague 6 Tomáš Chalupa.

He talked about the importance of the airport for employment and development in Prague 6, where the citizens are affected by the Ruzyně airport. The airport needs to expand but at the same time it's necessary to reduce noise impact. This is done for example by having a contest to stimulate the development of the most environmental friendly air carrier. A new railway from Prague city to the airport is being planned as well as an extended underground connection.

Rut Bizkova, minister of environment, mentioned that infrastructure must serve the citizens and that there therefore are limitations for airports in terms of land use planning and pollution. She stressed the need of a dialogue about the effects of infrastructure plans on environment as well as the cost.

- We are used to pay for the consequences and not for the prevention of environmental impacts. We should have investors for this area, said Mrs Bizkova.

Mr Giuseppe Rizzo from the EU Commission's DG Move shared the experiences from the Commission regarding the ash cloud crisis, the Airport Package and the new TEN-T guidelines. He stated that the ash cloud crisis from 15 through 21 of April cost airlines worldwide more than 1.7 billion dollars and the European airports 250 million Euros. Measures taken after this crisis are for example enforcement of passenger rights and flexibility in the application of rules.

During the Prague meeting the ARC Executive Committee also met, deciding on developing ARC comments on TEN-T consultation and to form an ARC interest group on Air Traffic

Management. One important discussion to mention from the agenda of the Half Yearly Meeting was the process of setting up a new ARC secretariat in Brussels and recruiting a new Secretary General from 2011.

The presentations from the Half Yearly Meeting in Prague are expected to be available on the ARC website/Members Area during the beginning of August.

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