

## Statement by the Chairman and CEO of Aena, Maurici Lucena, on the announcement by Ryanair

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It would be hard to find in contemporary business history another case such as Ryanair where the dissonance between a company's operational excellence and the dishonesty of its communications policy is so striking.

Ryanair's impertinence and uninhibited public demands on democratic governments in countries where it operates its flights with the aim of obtaining economic advantages, shed light upon two deep-rooted and unedifying characteristics of this airline company. The first is that Ryanair has a disturbingly plutocratic idea of the political system, i.e. it seeks to intimidate public opinion by slashing its flights, calls for the resignation of ministers from half of Europe and the president of the European Commission, mocks democratically elected politicians, and calls for laws to be changed in its favour because it believes that government decision-making should bend to the interests of the most economically powerful companies such as Ryanair, instead of protecting the "general interest". The second characteristic is Ryanair's communications and institutional relations policy, which is in permanent and deliberate conflict with objective facts and truthfulness. Here are a few examples:

- Ryanair's constant challenge of the Spanish regulatory framework for airports and Aena's airport network model, considered a success story by experts worldwide, is not an isolated event. This is, in fact, Ryanair's *modus operandi* in all the countries in which it is present, where it deploys constant public pressing of central and regional governments for short-term financial gain at the expense of taxpayers' money and the long-term sustainability of the airport system. In 2024 and 2025 alone, Ryanair has threatened and attempted to intimidate public authorities in Germany, France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and the UK, as demonstrated by the following [link](#).
- In 2025, the number of international tourists visiting Spain will approach an all-time record of 100 million, and the volume of air traffic scheduled by airlines in the "winter season 2025" (from the end of October 2025 until the end of March 2026) at Spanish airports, announced yesterday, is also a new all-time record. Under these circumstances, Ryanair's assertion in today's press conference that "Spain is now closed to tourism" and that "the Spanish government is *anti-tourism*" is astounding.

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- In accordance with the regulatory framework of Aena's activity (its cornerstone being Act 18/2014) and the obligatory application of objective mathematical formulas, Aena has proposed an increase of €0.68 in airport tariffs in 2026. Everyone knows that a person's decision of whether to take a plane or not does not depend on whether the ticket will cost 68 cents more next year, yet Ryanair insists again and again to the contrary, while it has itself brazenly raised its air fares in the last year by an average of 21%!
- When Ryanair states that it could invest billions of euros in Spain with new air routes if Aena and the Spanish Government would subsidise its activity in regional airports, it simply misrepresents the reality: the vast majority of these investments referred to are the purchases of Boeing aircraft in its fleet, whose percentage of manufacturing in Spain is under 3%. Therefore, these aircraft purchases by Ryanair worth billions do not imply investing in Spain.
- Ryanair states that Aena's investments in Spanish airports are paid for by the airlines, however, this is untrue: all of Aena's investments are fully paid for by Aena with its money. To argue otherwise is a sophistry tantamount to saying that Ryanair's investments when it purchases planes for its fleet are paid for by the passengers who buy the Irish airline's tickets; or that Inditex's investments in its factories are paid for by the citizens who buy its clothing.
- The setting of Aena's airport charges is not the result of a capricious decision by Aena. Act 18/2014 and its subsequent regulatory implementations, which were drafted and approved by the People's Party (PP) in 2014, exhaustively determine the approval of airport charges, which are legally "public property charges" since Aena's aeronautical activity is subject to economic regulation rooted in solid microeconomic principles. Contrary to what Ryanair maintains, airport tariffs that are defined by law cannot be modified by either the Spanish Government or Aena at will, since to distort public charges whose nature is very different from ordinary private prices without justification, would be committing an unlawful act. Ryanair is fully aware of this, but with its fallacious public statements, it seeks to mislead public opinion in order to promote its own interests.
- Although Ryanair constantly denies it, Aena's airport charges are generally among the most competitive within Europe, thanks to a highly demanding regulation which, amongst other factors, leads to a high operational efficiency of the company.
- Specifically, the airport charges paid by airlines for additional passengers in 2023 at Aena's regional airports amount to approximately €2, much lower than the average of €10.35 for Aena's airports in 2025. These subsidised fees of approximately €2 per additional passenger at regional airports explicitly demonstrate Aena's efforts on one hand, and those of the Spanish Government



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by means of economic regulation on the other hand, to promote aeronautical activity in the regions. Ryanair's statement that it is cancelling routes at these airports because the charges are exorbitant is therefore untrue. The reality is more prosaic: Ryanair is cancelling them because it is transferring its aircraft to airports where it can set higher prices for its airline tickets and thus earn more money, such as at large Spanish airports (despite the fact that airport charges there are substantially higher than at regional airports). This economic reality is currently exacerbated by the fact that there is a global problem of delayed deliveries of aircraft purchased by airlines (a supply-side constraint).

- It is not true that Ryanair is genuinely concerned about the welfare of Spanish citizens and the competitiveness of the regions. What Ryanair wants is to make more money, even if it is paid out of Spanish taxpayers' pockets. Proof of the above is that on 16 January 2025, Ryanair DAC CEO Eddie Wilson stated without batting an eyelid that his favourite airport model in Spain is that of Castellón Airport, owned by the Government of the Valencian Community, an ill-fated symbol of public waste in infrastructure and which lost 11.6 million euros in 2023, paid for by the citizens of the Valencian Community. Or to put it in other words: by praising Castellón Airport, Ryanair has shown its true colours. It is somewhat surprising that Ryanair's head of communications and institutional relations in Spain did not warn Eddie Wilson in advance of the tremendous reputational impact of his statements.
- (Let me make it clear that, in a market economy, there is nothing wrong with a company seeking to make as much money as possible. But it would definitely be appreciated if Ryanair did not disguise its monetary goals with statements made in bad faith, and also if the money chased by the airline did not come out of Spanish taxpayers' pockets).
- Another proof of Ryanair's real priorities and those of its executives is the stratospheric bonus of over 100 million euros! to be earned by Ryanair Group CEO Michael O'Leary based on the achievement of a series of targets and his staying on in the company ([Michael O'Leary, a punto de ganar un bonus de 100 millones](#)).
- It is untrue that regional airports would be financially sustainable if airport charges were €0 for Ryanair, as proposed by the Irish airline ([Ryanair exige a la Junta 750.000 euros para mantener el vuelo entre Valladolid y Barcelona](#)). There is abundant empirical evidence that demonstrates that free airport infrastructures and services at regional airports are only possible if, instead of being paid for by Ryanair, they are paid for by Spanish taxpayers through subsidies from the Spanish Government, autonomous community governments, regional councils and municipal councils. For this reason, Ryanair is notorious among mayors and councillors of the governments of autonomous communities for its constant search for public money to finance its flights at regional airports.

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- It is not true, as Ryanair claims, that airport charges at regional airports and, in general, the functioning of the Spanish airport system, are an undesirable consequence of Aena's abuse of its 'dominant position'. As recommended by economic theory and empirical evidence from the field of microeconomics, the economic regulation arising from Act 18/2014 prevents Aena from taking advantage of the "market power" of its infrastructures, proof of which are the current good performance of Spanish airports (with continuous record traffic volumes) and the relatively quite low levels of airport charges.
- Aena sincerely considers it a matter of good fortune that Ryanair, given its operational quality and efficiency, is one of the major airlines at Spanish airports. Contrary to what Ryanair's public statements imply, the airline is not obliged to use Aena airports: it uses them at its own will, and above all, because, in accordance with its emphatic objective of profit maximisation, it is in its interest to do so. No supernatural demonic force compels Ryanair to be one of Aena's biggest customers and to sell its tickets to more than 60 million people travelling to and from Spain.
- It is not true that the routes cancelled by Ryanair cannot be recovered. A noteworthy example of this new winter season is the renewal of the Valladolid - Barcelona route thanks to Vueling, a route that had been cancelled by Ryanair with clear political intentions. Aena will continue to work hard to help regional and local governments and economic and tourism associations to boost connectivity and open new air routes.
- One final example, representing the heights of dishonesty and poor taste, is the statistical method used by Ryanair in its press conference today to distort the real figures and make its message more provocative. The number of slots for the winter season formally requested by Ryanair, as recorded in the official databases (i.e. its schedule), is significantly higher than the figures reported by Ryanair in its press conference today. Ryanair urgently needs to clarify this quantitative discrepancy.

To conclude, a country such as Spain where tourism and air transport are so crucial for its economy, citizens' welfare and regional cohesion, cannot design and formulate its airport system according to the spurious and selfish interests of a single airline. The Spanish airport model provides all regions of Spain with access to air transport, boosting regional structuring through economic solidarity between large and small airports. A part of the fees of the larger airports covers the losses at smaller airports and, in this way, Aena manages a large network of airports without seeking recourse to taxpayers' money.

If Spanish airports were to evolve to the tune of Ryanair's demands, whining, cajoling and unbearable extortionist strategies, they would cease to function well (as

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they do today) in the medium and long term, and would not be financially sustainable. Aena and its shareholders (the State, i.e. Spanish citizens, and private investors) deserve at least the same respect as Ryanair's shareholders. The Irish airline is undoubtedly an admirable business success story, which has helped to make air travel universal in the 21st century. It is clear that over the past decades, Aena has benefited from Ryanair's activity and drive; and, simultaneously, Ryanair has benefited from the high quality and efficiency of Aena's Spanish airports by freely deciding to assign a large number of its aircraft to Spanish routes. For some time now, however, Ryanair has sought to take advantage of its high market share in Spain to transform this symbiotic relationship into one of vassalage, which will never be accepted by Aena and which would seriously damage the functioning of the Spanish airport system. It is truly a pity that Ryanair's communications and institutional relations policy appears to be governed by hypocrisy, rudeness and blackmail.