



RIGA AVIATION FORUM 2025 - COLLABORATION, INNOVATION, LEADERSHIP - INTERVIEW WITH ATIS ŠVINKA, MINISTER OF TRANSPORT OF LATVIA

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For those who are less familiar, Latvia is a country in the middle of the Baltic States, home of airBaltic, aviation hub in the region thanks to Riga Airport, and a place known for its quick thinking and inventiveness. The amazing BalticBees team also calls it home. Some lucky aviation events are honored by a greeting of Transport Minister. Riga Aviation Forum 2025 was THE place where I had the pleasure to meet Atis Švinka, Minister of Transport of Latvia. The Minister not only gave the welcome speech, he exchanged views with industry players, and listened to various presentations on the most important challenges aviation is facing today. Interested, attentive, proactive, determined to take action—that is the impression I got after speaking with the Minister. I am pleased to share a few points from our discussion:

T.O. Mister Minister, you just welcomed Riga Aviation Forum 2025 visitors, speakers. I have one simple question. You told that Latvia could be leading Baltic aviation industry. What Latvia should change or do to be an absolute leader among Baltic states?

A.Š. Yes, it's my understanding and vision. Actually, it's also our heritage and we have done already a lot. Riga is the center of aviation in Baltic states, and we are leading in, in terms of airport

system, in, ecosystem around aviation. AirBaltic also is good example of how we can see, how we can also take this leadership in the region. As a minister, I'm encouraging our Estonian and Lithuanian friends to look deeper on how we can use this, our great asset, AirBaltic, not only as a Latvia success story, but also together as a Baltic success story. So we are in this discussion together, how we can use it and to take this big opportunity in our region I'm also urging our Lithuanian and Estonian friends to do more research so that we can exploit Air Baltic, our tremendous asset, as a Baltic success story as well as a Latvian one. I would say Riga as aviation center could play bigger role, not only in Baltic region but in Nordic-Baltic region. So, I'm also telling to my friends in Scandinavia and Nordic countries, "Hey, have a look at Baltics and Latvia as a home market. Let's look together, so we can all benefit from this cooperation." And I also mentioned in my opening words that partnership, networking, cooperation is a, a path to success.

T.O. Latvia always have been an aviation and innovation hub for Baltic states. During last years, I've seen numerous companies coming, talking to Latvian industry friends and colleagues to establish many innovative companies. Are you open for more European companies coming to Latvia to establish eVTOL trial or something like that?

A.Š. Absolutely. My personal opinion is that we should support, be receptive to, and invite the ideas of investors. As previously said, Riga serves not only as hub for passengers, but also as a center for ideas and technologies. Latvia, we are a little nation. We can invite a lot of investors since we are adaptable, quick, and as large as a laboratory. This allows us to test new ideas and technology. Additionally, Latvia has relatively open startup regulations that could serve as the foundation for new ideas and test sites, such concepts, including aviation.

T.O. Some of my French colleagues within the industry have expressed their admiration for Latvia's efficiency and the ease with which they can communicate with officials. It would take a few years in France. It's very different here. Therefore, it's good to know that you're willing to accept more visitors. What goals does Latvian aviation need to accomplish in the next five years?

A.Š. We'll see. One thing is that reality is what we see as we look ahead. Geopolitically, we are in a very tough and stressful time, and I suppose aviation is no exception. If a threat is near our borders, we can see it. Aviation is also impacted, and this resilience element is crucial since it demonstrates to other partners how we can overcome these obstacles and maintain airspace control and surveillance. We can guarantee how we can achieve it with our institutions, and we have really good competencies. Furthermore, drone coalitions is something that is growing quickly. This indicates that the aviation environment can also benefit from this area. Of course, to strengthen and lay the groundwork for expanding passenger airports, as I mentioned, collaborations supporting airports in Lithuania, Estonia, Tallinn, and Vilnius, as well as our successful story with AirBaltics. We have a lot of homework, and I'm excited for all the amazing things we'll do over the next five years.

T.O. I hope that I will be invited for next Riga Aviation Forum...

A.Š. I'm positive you will.

T.O. We will then talk about our accomplishments. Although I missed the most recent RAF, it was encouraging to see the amount of progress made since 2023.

A.Š. It's great to hear.

T.O. Looking forward and thank you very much.

A.Š. Thank you very much!

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