

ACI EUROPE and AEA Joint Debate on Terrorism, Aviation & European Economies

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Conclusions by Hilde Vautmans MEP

Thank you very much,

Good afternoon,

This conference is very timely indeed. Exactly 2 months after the attacks, Brussels is still recovering from the hard shock. Yet, other tragedies are happening again. For example, we still don't know what went on with the Egyptair flight from last week. It is clear, ladies and gentlemen, that people are scared to travel through airports. In comparison with last year, 17% fewer people travelled on Brussels Airlines in April and - 40 % in Brussels Airport. Now, at the time where families are planning their summer holidays, we all start wondering how much liberty and freedom of movement we still enjoy in the European Union.

Yet, air travel is safer than any other transport means in the world. Fatal accidents are occurring less than once in every two million flights. We all know it's much more dangerous to take a car. Yet the attacks have painfully proven that our security needs to be enhanced.

Our airports are the gateway to the world. They play an essential role in a mature economy. They are important for the European economy, like Mr Khan stated. Employment booms when an airport flourishes. They must be protected and inspire trust. This seminar was about matching the airport security and the need to restore faith and trust. For our security and for our economic well-being.

1. Airport security

Let's not fool ourselves. A 100% airport security does not exist. It is quite clear that it is very hard to stop an individual suicide-bomber. We need to find a balance between free movement of people and business on the one hand and security on the other. We learned from Olivier Jankovec (ACI EUROPE) that the cost for security was 5 % of operational costs in 2001 and is now up to 20 %.

The Association of European Airlines (AEA), which represents 22 European airlines in Brussels, and Airports Council International (ACI) were right to organise today's meeting: this concerns all of us. What we now see, is a crippled airport that is being revamped in record time. But we have to move beyond the point where military are needed to check our luggage. We all know that this enhanced security will cost money and men. Newest technologies need to secure us without arriving 3 hours early! Bart Mos (senior security officer from Schiphol airport) made it very clear: we need to invest more in (new) technologies. Wilfried Covent (head of security of Brussels Airport Company) highlighted several questions about the security on landside. More particular: what about the pre-check area? The challenge, like he said, is to make it reasonable to all parties.

We can only bring back confidence if we have a different set of measures with for example behaviour detection. About profiling there are several doubts as to discrimination and the easiness to avoid being profiled. But these measures cannot be different among the airports across the EU. We cannot trigger an un-co-ordinated race to tighter security, simply because it might attract new attempts to the weaker airports. On the other hand, we cannot loosen our controls just to attract more customers and compete to the bottom.

We, politicians at the European level, will have to create the necessary frame, to enable those people to work together, to re-create that European space of safety and security again.

2. The broader security context: a safe airport can only exist in a safe Europe

Like Bart Mas said: "In aviation the world is your neighbour." Airports connect us to the world. Their security is therefore relying upon the global security context. Safe airports rely upon a safe Europe. As politicians, we need to step beyond the debate about the narrow self-interest and enhance the European area of safety. Our proposals take into account that our external and internal security have become closely linked.

Terrorists don't know borders. And as we saw lately, everybody had some information but nobody saw the full picture. France for instance didn't want to participate in the Schengen Information System before the attacks. Now, they are a big advocate of it.

Mr. Covent said: "Those guys should never have reached the airport. If they arrive, we already lost."

European measures, like the Schengen regulations and the demands for systematic use of biometrics, need to be imposed fully, to ensure internal security. But we cannot feel safe in the EU, if there's no European Border- and Coast Guard protecting our outside borders. Our states and institutions need to work much more closely together. This was also pointed out by Mr Carlos Mestre (Head of Unit, DG Move, European Commission). As a matter of fact, I have been pledging to enhance the powers of EUROPOL, to create a real European Intelligence Agency. These efforts need to be matched domestically with de-radicalisation operations. Fight the Foreign Fighters – even in their home turf battleground.

However, our society cannot continue to dance on the tune of extreme measures, that would be needed against extreme and radical behaviour. We cannot continue to answer fire with fire; we need to prevent the fire. We need proportionate and effective measures. And share the good practices as stated by Mr Carlos Mestre.

3. European co-ordination between states and private actors

He stated also that more security means more European co-operation. And I'm not thinking only of better co-operation between the 28 member states. Nor am I only thinking of the possible creation of European capacities to fight terrorism. I also insist on co-operation between states and the private sector. We need to enable a legal frame at the European level for this. The travel agents have already become our partners in the fight against terrorism. In this context, we are all aware of the creation of the Passenger Name Record system. But let me be crystal clear. It's not the Holy Grail of counter terrorism.

This is a burdensome instrument, that will need tweaking and adjustment along the road. Therefore, the European Parliament will need your feedback about the implementation in the next months. Please, keep us posted!

And Bart Mos, I will not forget that implementation is much more difficult than policy making.

4. Trust: give confidence to citizens and companies

The image of Brussels, and of Belgium as a whole, is built on trust. Therefore it is scaring to hear from Frédéric Dechamps (Vice-President Sales of Brussels Airlines) that Brussels is the second city in the world to avoid by US-travel agencies. Security is not only about facts, but also about the *perception* of security. We need to build trust again.

No, we don't need former Prime Ministers who say that we better fly from another airport than Brussels. No, we don't need other airports promoting their capacities to compete with a fallen colleague. These attacks challenge us all.

We feel them in our economy, in the hotels and restaurants as Jan Vansteen (Chairman Belgian Travel Organisation) and Frédéric Trauwaen (Marketing Director Visit Brussels) said, in our cultural life, in our private life. We want to trust again and feel safe. We want to fly again and visit other places. We need to be told that we are safe and have it proven. And our (opinion) leaders have to do the same, so that we can kick-start our economy and public life again.

The negative impact on the economy of Brussels has been in double digits. People are afraid to take a flight out of Brussels! And of course, the activities of some unions, who overstress their individual interests against the repair of society as a whole, have not been helpful. To state it once again: these actions do **not** promote the image of Brussels as a reliable or attractive destination. We need to invest in our economic potential, to bring the trust back!

As Frédéric Trauwaen stated clearly there are 3 important topics: security, reputation of the airport and reputation in terms of governance.

I want to end with a positive note. Once again, I thank you all for the hard work you put in our security on a daily basis. Our airports are essential to sustain our open economy, and secure jobs. You do a sterling job every day, again and again. Yes, there are adjustments possible. Let us indeed fight with the newest technologies and out-of-the-box approaches but let us not forget to lead by example.

Thanks to ACI EUROPE and AEA for organising this seminar. And you can be sure: I will not forget that implementation is more difficult than policy making. And, Mr Dechamps, let us hope that the press will show also the good results of investments in security and trust building. Mr Vansteen I heard your message to do more and I can say that you can count on me.

Thank you all for your attention.

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