

Handout

Initiative for sustainable security and safety in air travel and for the avoidance of aviation accidents – ensuring high security and safety standards through the aircraft ground handler

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Introduction

In a document on the topic "Airport Capacity and Ground Handling –Towards a more efficient policy“ (2007/2092(INI)), the EU states that air travel (traffic without airport restraints) will experience growth averaging at least 4.3 percent per annum, which would mean that demand for air travel would be at two and a half times today's level by 2025.

That would mean that 60 airports in Europe (without taking new investments into account) would no longer be capable of handling the traffic levels typically seen at peak hours of operation, which would result in delays.

The document also stated that the necessary expansion possibilities at existing airports are not sufficient to cover demand, which means that it will be necessary to build new airports while accelerating the throughput of existing airports through efficient ground handling services.

To bring this about, the Committee on Transport and Tourism recommends that any attempt to amend the Directive 96/67/EC should “appropriately” concentrate on the quality of ground handling services. This should include an obligation of ground handling service providers to guarantee proper training for their employees and an appropriate level of safety and protection for all users, passengers and cargo.

IATA, the International Air Transport Association, has determined that total damage incurred during ground handling activities amounts to \$4 billion per year.

1. Approach

Taking the text passed by the European Parliament as a starting point, the Works Council of Flughafen München GmbH (FMG) passed a resolution at its meeting on July 24, 2007 to launch the "Initiative for sustainable security in air transport and the avoidance of air transport accidents – ensuring high security and safety standards through aircraft handlers“ with the objective of informing the public on the developments and effects under the Council Directive 96/67/EC of October 15, 1996 in connection with the links between aviation security and safety and the training level of aircraft handling staff and the need for an at least EU-wide binding regulation on training standards for ground handling service providers to ensure – to the greatest feasible extent – protection of the more than 700 million annual passengers in the EU.

The members of the Works Council of FMG see it as their duty to do everything possible to point out the interrelationships and the dangers stemming from inadequate training of ground handlers as well as the potential impact on passengers, local inhabitants, airport employees, buildings and facilities and on public life and the global economy. The Works Council members are convinced that a Europe-wide, standardized and binding qualification standard will represent a significant gain in the area of air transport safety.

This demand is based on the fact that there is no binding regulation on the qualification of ground handling employees at the EU level and, while there is such a regulation – in principle – at the national level (Ground Handling Services Ordinance), its provisions have not been finalised or adapted to the complex developments of aircraft handling, nor is it being enforced.

For the first time a collective agreement has now been signed for ground handlers that actually contradicts this regulation and no longer requires appropriate training, simply in response to predatory competition. The demand is based on the fact that the relationship to and influence of all ground handling employees on security and safety in air travel is not adequately recognised, and their interface role for security and safety in air travel is not receiving the attention that would be necessary to see and give appropriate recognition to the significance of this service for preventing dangers to air travel.

It must be stated that the Directive 67/96/EC has largely achieved the objective of reducing the costs of airlines; however, it has significantly fallen short of the goal of improving the services. This is particularly evident when we compare the activities and training of ground handlers with the increased security and safety requirements in air travel (Security and Safety: see 2.). Since the implementation of the Directive in Germany (1998), but also globally, the issue of safety and security in aviation has again substantially gained in importance through the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. As a result, security regulations have been significantly tightened (see 2.). In connection with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, security experts demanded that turnover among all staff in airport security zones be kept as low as possible, and stated that employees should identify with the company and be highly motivated. For this to be the case, they must be satisfied with their working conditions. Thus the employment contracts of ground handling service providers must give them the assurance that they are not being exploited, and that they are a valuable element of the system “safety and security in air travel.” This motivation of all employees is a prerequisite for ensuring that employees are able to implement each handling operation attentively and efficiently.

In the area of safety, unfortunately, despite the significantly greater demands imposed in this area of activity and on the performance of ground handling employees, no usable regulations were put in place in the interest of aviation safety. Existing training standards were actually lowered in the course of liberalisation and the resulting price war among ground service providers to obtain contracts and conquer market share. Airlines are focusing more on price and are often losing sight of quality. Temporary employment agencies are offering people to airports as trained aircraft handlers who have undergone only a two-hour classroom training session and demonstrably have no knowledge relevant to the subject of “safety and security in air travel” or how an aircraft is handled in everyday operations.

What is inconceivable for so-called low-cost airlines or aircraft mechanics – namely the reduction of required training standards, non-EASA-compliant aircraft checks or deployment of staff to repair aircraft who do not meet the EASA standard – is accepted without objection at the most important and complex interface: aircraft ground handling. As a result, the very reasonable and sensible regulations in connection with security and safety are being evaded – an intolerable state of affairs that is also incomprehensible.

On closer inspection, and in view of the current development of the situation with ground handling service providers, mandatory training standards for aircraft handling staff must be put in place without delay to counteract these trends. These standards must apply to all ground services providers across the EU. This training standard must be designed to meet the latest requirements for the delivery of ground handling services with regard to safety and security in air travel, and it must take into account future developments in connection with the objectives of the EU: more throughput at existing airports through efficient ground handling services and the avoidance of economic damage in the EU.

2. Safety and security in air travel

To ensure safety and security in air travel and avoid aviation accidents, the EU and the EU member states continually issue numerous laws and ordinances. These standards always focus on people.

When it comes to security (defending against the dangers of terrorism), regulatory activity focuses primarily on individuals.

When it comes to safety (defending against damage to persons and property resulting from accidents and technical hazards), the focus is also on technical standards and monitoring.

Security:

Regulation (EC) 2320/2002 of the European Parliament and Council of 16 December 2002 establishing common rules in the field of civil aviation (referred to below as R 2320) stipulates in Annex 2.2

- controlled access to restricted areas
- background checks of staff with access to restricted areas
- regular staff training
- mandatory issuing and wearing of staff identification cards
- mandatory passes for vehicles and mandatory vehicle checks

- screening of staff, carried items and (again!) vehicles (Annex 2.3).

In Annex 12 the drafters of the regulation then return to the subject of “Staff recruitment and training”. An amendment to R 2320 has been on the way for a year; recently, the concept of the “known supplier” was established with the new R 915/2007 regulation, which regulates the special area of the supply of liquids and duty free bags. Many provisions have been passed or are currently under review for the detailed implementation of the approved regulations.

It can be stated that the number of security regulations is continually increasing at the EU level and in the individual countries; security regulations are characterised by draconian harshness, an enormous regulatory density, a love of detail and multiple overlapping security regulations: All of these standards also affect the delivery of ground handling services and bolster security there.

In this context it must be pointed out that all employees in restricted areas are expected to undergo strict screening without giving any specific grounds for suspicion.

Safety:

Regulations in the field of safety can be basically divided into two areas. All safety regulations that result from concrete and mandatory provisions under the EASA standard apply to aircraft, their manufacturing or operation, or staff training. In this area, the safety regulations are precise in relation to the security regulations and yield genuine benefits in terms of safety.

The remaining safety regulations, in particular the requirements for ground handling service providers and the training of ground handling staff, are imprecise and clearly contradict the objectives set at the EU level.

For instance, Article 14 of the EU Ground Handling Directive permits member states to make the performance of ground handling services conditional upon obtaining the approval of a public authority (a provision which the Federal Republic of Germany, like almost all other member states, did not utilise. Hence the standard has no impact and makes no contribution to safety in ground handling!). The criteria for granting this approval must relate to a sound financial situation and sufficient insurance cover and “to the general and operational security and safety of installations, aircraft, equipment and persons...” Art. 14 provides no details, i.e., even if the Federal Republic of Germany were to introduce an approval process for service providers, there would be no reason to anticipate a gain in safety.

Article 17 “Safety and security” is similarly lacking in substance: “The provisions of this Directive in no way affect the rights and obligations of Member States in respect of law and order, safety and security at airports.” – Germany and Italy learned about the value – or lack of value – of such clauses when they attempted to utilise them in their national implementation of Article 18 “Social and environmental protection”. In the meantime, however, the social dimension of competition – beyond so-called flexicurity measures – is also being increasingly recognised in the EU, and environmental aspects are also taking on a new and highly topical dimension through EMAs and the CO₂ reduction efforts.

What remains at the national level are the criteria pursuant to Section 8 Par. 1 BADV (Ground Handling Services Ordinance) in combination with Annex 3 "Requirements for performing ground handling services". These passages say a great deal about the reliability of the company, its ability to meet financial commitments and the professional qualifications of the persons appointed to manage business operations: In No. 2 A) Par. 3, admittedly, it is required that the manager must be an aircraft handler with the Chamber of Industry and Trade (IHK) examination or an equivalent qualification; the requirements listed in No. 2 B) for operations and the deployment of staff are far less specific, however. This yields no gain for real safety on the airport apron. Only real compliance with Annex 3 B Par. 4 would make a real difference to safety. This paragraph specifically states that "the operation and handling of ground handling equipment and technical installations may be performed exclusively by qualified aircraft ground handlers or employees with equivalent knowledge and skills". Unfortunately this regulation – as was already mentioned above – has not been genuinely implemented, nor is mandatory enforcement being carried out. This would yield benefits only at the national level, however, and would thus not represent a significant improvement for the EU.

The introduction of mandatory safety management at airports as stipulated under ICAO Annex 14 (No. 1.4 Certification of Aerodromes) is the right approach, but has so far failed because of the inability of the safety management operator to enforce it. It is unable to impose and enforce binding regulations for the training and qualification of aircraft ground handling staff. Consequently the safety management system is having no impact, and the actual goals of safety management as required by ICAO since 2005 are being watered down.

If we compare the relatively lax and shapeless regulations of safety considerations in relation to aircraft handling and the regulations in effect for safety in connection with aircraft (manufacture, operation, maintenance) and security, the latter are remarkable for their draconian harshness, enormous regulatory density, love of detail and multiple overlapping security regulations that are also constantly assessed and subject to mandatory controls.

It is worth mentioning that in the area of security, two factors must coincide before damage can result: 1. "The security measure must be defective" and 2. "A person must be present with malicious intent who is in a position to act accordingly."

3. Directive 96/67/EC (Ground Handling Services Directive)

On October 15, 1996 the EU passed the Directive 96/67/EC, which is better known as the Ground Handling Services Directive. The objective of the directive was to reduce the costs of airlines and improve services by liberalising access to the ground handling services market, and in particular to promote competition. By opening up markets which were to some extent closed, the directive indeed succeeded in exerting pressure on the so-called monopolists (above all airports) in the delivery of ground handling services, helping new service providers to get established, and thus significantly reducing the handling prices, so that the purpose of the directive was achieved.

4. The situation of ground handling service providers

Across Europe, ground handling service providers are embroiled in fierce competition for hotly contested market share. These battles are fought mainly on the basis of price, with quality generally playing a subordinate role. High-quality service providers are forced to adjust their structures in response to the competition and thus must also make sometimes significant downward adjustments to their time-tested training and quality standards. Experience has shown that pricing is the only means by which new providers of ground handling services can gain market share. This often drives them into ruinous price wars with former monopolists or key players which have a substantial advantage over them in terms of quality and performance. These aggressive price wars are leading to training and quality standards among new suppliers that will not measure up to the EU objectives for safety and security in air travel and would certainly be a cause for concern among passengers. If further efforts are made to promote competition, the situation will become noticeably worse. The accession of new countries to the EU will also presumably lead to lower training and quality standards. The best examples of this are the situations described above: a collective agreement that stipulates completion of the IHK examination only for a small group of employees and the fully qualified aircraft handlers offered to Munich Airport with only two hours of classroom instruction behind them.

5. The situation of aircraft ground handlers

In recent years, the aircraft ground handling profession and the related activities have become increasingly important in terms of security and safety in air travel. Particularly in the wake of terrorist attacks there has been an increase in rules and regulations for protecting against terrorism risks. It is obvious that aircraft ground handlers, like all other employees in restricted areas, must undergo screening for air safety purposes. The requirements imposed on aircraft ground handlers are constantly increasing due to the complex tasks and the continual rise in the demands of the job. The aircraft ground handler has the task of carrying out final monitoring of compliance with security regulations at the aircraft, whether these regulations involve passengers, cargo or the baggage loaded by the handler. The handler must maintain an overview of everything happening around the aircraft and must intervene whenever he recognises security-related irregularities, for instance unusual persons, persons not visibly displaying an identification badge or unusual or non-declared cargo or baggage items.

For safety the aircraft ground handler has even more crucial importance. The original tasks of loading and unloading aircraft are being squeezed into an increasingly tight timeframe. Every minute costs the airport, the handlers or the airlines money. The above-mentioned EU insights on the need to expand airports have not yet been taken into account. This increasingly tight timeframe is constantly forcing aircraft handlers to work faster to comply with the demands of the operating environment and the performance standards. It must also be taken into account that the rules which must be consistently applied by aircraft ground handlers are becoming more complex, differ from airline to airline and above all are increasing in terms of importance and sheer volume. As aircraft ground handlers take on services formerly performed by airlines with their own staff such as operational activities or final aircraft checks (final walkaround by aircraft mechanic), their activity gains in status, but also becomes more demanding and significant. It is important to note that along with personal reliability, aircraft ground handlers must be highly reliable in the performance of their work. They must also be able to cope with pressure from supervisors and customers to meet schedules and deliver performance, have a strong grasp of complex situations and interactions, and be capable of adapting quickly to new situations. They need a good knowledge of technology to be able to spot irregularities or safety-related damage to the aircraft, but be assertive and willing to stop a fully loaded aircraft under time pressure, for instance if they see an irregularity or notice a mistake they have made, and must also have the character to admit it. Finally, it is important for them to have the ability to continually update their skills, and also to be able to apply this knowledge in connection with aviation safety with a zero tolerance philosophy to protect the lives entrusted to them as well as protecting the aircraft, which in some cases are worth hundreds of millions of euros, from damage or crashes. It is fundamental requirement for aviation safety that aircraft ground handlers must be loyal, incorruptible and absolutely reliable. These requirements apply to all employees in the aircraft handling process.

For security to be compromised, (see p. 6, par. 4), there must be a person with malicious intentions; in aircraft ground handling, someone can have good intentions, but a mistake usually has consequences. The greater the differences become between the necessary training and the actual requirements, the greater the probability of an error in aircraft handling. This does not even take into account the individual's suit-

ability for the job and the often extreme conditions under which it is performed (weather, time pressure, specifications, etc.).

6. Risk potential through non-regulation

In the area of security it could certainly be argued that, with 100% implementation of and compliance with security regulations, the risk of a security breach cannot affect aircraft ground handlers. Unfortunately, experience has shown that security regulations and measures cannot provide 100% security, and that absolute protection therefore does not and cannot exist – either through well-trained personnel or individuals who specifically look for loopholes, which will always exist in the tight but never impenetrable security net. The most recent examples are the more than 100 employees at the airport in Chicago who had access cards to restricted areas despite false identification papers and the four Greenpeace activists who succeeded in breaching all security barriers at London Heathrow on February 25, 2008, making their way to an aircraft, climbing it and affixing a banner on its tail. Fortunately neither of these incidents involved individuals with malicious intentions; otherwise the consequences for aviation could have been disastrous.

It is therefore necessary in particular to improve the quality assurance measures through the responsible authorities in the member states to bolster the aviation safety and security system and meet the standards defined under Community requirements. One example is the “secure supply chain” in the cargo area, a concept that is implemented in everyday operations only with great difficulty, and which continually raises problems for aircraft handlers in their assessment or confronts them with new problems.

In the field of safety there is no way of reducing the tasks performed by aircraft ground handlers for the protection of the people and property entrusted to them. The aircraft ground handler is the interface at which all relevant concerns in aircraft handling come together. A single error in the work of the aircraft ground handler can have dramatic consequences, the least of which would be a damaged aircraft or the erroneous loading of a suitcase. From actual airport operations it is reported that it is no longer uncommon to see unsecured palettes weighing tons and improper combinations of hazardous goods in cargo holds. It is also important to point out that aircraft ground handlers are reporting increasing numbers of cases in which, with their trained eyes, they are identifying safety-relevant damage on arriving aircraft and informing their superiors.

The issues which – for good reason – are regulated down to the last detail for aircraft mechanics have so far been overlooked for aircraft ground handlers.

If the evident reduction in training standards for aircraft handling continues it will no longer be possible in the near future to provide aircraft handling services in compliance with the standards specified by the EU.

The growth in air traffic described at the beginning of this text will lead to an exponential increase in the dangers because the simultaneous reduction in standards and the increase in requirements will not result in a zero error quota, but rather to a foreseeable disaster whose magnitude is impossible to predict.

7. Summary

The competition-driven downward adjustments in salaries of aircraft ground handlers which are still continuing are no longer acceptable against the backdrop of “Safety and security in air travel” and, to varying degrees in the regions of Europe, will make it difficult to recruit suitable aircraft ground handling staff. However, the fact that the training standards for performing the tasks of an aircraft ground handler are not regulated in terms of security and safety, so that the lives of passengers are deliberately put at risk, is not acceptable. Regulating air travel does not mean that human lives should be placed in danger through efforts to promote competition. Regulating air travel means achieving the right balance of price, performance and quality so that healthy and fair competition results. For this purpose, policymakers must implement and develop existing standards and conditions to ensure that the objectives are achieved in the interests of the more than 700,000,000 passengers in the EU, with stricter requirements for qualifying standards for flexicurity and safety. For the aircraft ground handlers this must take place under reasonable competitive pressures. To ensure that the EU objectives are achieved, the reasonable interest in a secure and healthy workplace must be taken into account.

8. Outlook

The EU resolves:

Due to the results on the necessary qualification standards in aircraft and baggage handling, on the basis of the EU standards and in view of the importance of safety and security in air travel, the EU Commission agrees to the following resolution:

1. As of January 1, 2010 all ground handling service providers in the European Union must ensure that every ground handling operation must be carried out with at least one qualified aircraft ground handler (in accordance with the EASA type ratings) with Cat 2, Cat 3 or Cat 4 training, and that baggage handlers must have at least Cat 2 or Cat 3 training, depending on their job and tasks.
2. As of January 1, 2010, training programmes for aircraft ground handling must be standardised to comply with EASA Annex Part (Aircraft ground handling: Cat 1, Cat 2, Cat 3 or Cat 4; baggage handling: Cat 1, Cat 2 or Cat 2a).
3. In recognition of the importance of aircraft ground handling for achieving the objectives of security and safety in air travel and the need for efficient ground handling to increase the throughput at airports, as of January 1, 2010 all ground handling service providers shall be compensated for the expense of meeting the standards of EASA training without incurring costs.
4. As of January 1, 2010 the regulations will be monitored at the national level.

9. Cross references

Joint Aviation Authorities: www.jaa.nl

Luftfahrt Bundesamt (German Civil Aviation Authority):

www.lba.de/cIn_010/nn_57316/DE/LBA/Organisation/Abteilung_20T/T2/T2_EASA.html

German Ground Handling Directive: www.luftrecht-online.de/regelwerke/pdf/badv.pdf

Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention):

<http://www.icao.int/icaonet/dcs/7300.html>

Directive 96/67/EC (Ground Handling Services Directive): [http://eur-](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31996L0067:EN:HTML)

[lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31996L0067:EN:HTML](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31996L0067:EN:HTML)

European Aviation Safety Agency:

http://www.easa.europa.eu/ws_prod/g/g_about.php

Air Safety Act (Germany): www.aufenthaltstitel.de/luftsig.html#14

Safety Management: www.2.tu-berlin.de/foreign-relations/archiv/tui_58/fricke.pdf

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO): www.icao.int; [www.luftrecht-](http://www.luftrecht-online.de/einzelheiten/verwaltung/icao.htm)

[online.de/einzelheiten/verwaltung/icao.htm](http://www.luftrecht-online.de/einzelheiten/verwaltung/icao.htm)

German Airports Association: www.adv-net.org/de/gfx/index.php

Munich Airport: www.munich-airport.de

Aircraft incident reports:

www.airliners.de/safety/nachrichten/artikelseite.php?articleid=13795

Aircraft accidents and their causes (in German):

www.spiegel.de/sptv/themenabend/0,1518,232467,00.html

Air Transport Initiative: www.initiative-luftverkehr.de/ziele/index.html