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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 437
19 October 1955

Simplification of formalities at airports

Motion for a recommendation
tabled by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights

Draft Recommendation [1]

The Assembly,

Having examined the report of the Committee on Legal and Administrative Questions on the simplification of formalities at airports (Document 437),

Requests the Committee of Ministers to give immediate consideration to the following recommendations and to report not later than the spring session, 1956, on the steps taken to implement these recommendations and that this report should not be confined to a statement of the existing position and of the difficulties involved but should include measures taken to improve the situation;

Formalities at airports

Considering that the technical and administrative formalities and operations which take place between reporting time at air terminals and taking-off time at airports cause considerable and unnecessary inconvenience and waste of time to passengers;

Considering that the disproportion between the time spent in the air and the time spent travelling to and from airports and going though formalities there is particularly objectionable in the case of short journeys such as from London to Paris,

Welcomes the recommendations on facilitation passed by the Conference of the International Civil Aviation Organisation held in Strasbourg on the initiative of the Council of Europe, from 21st April to 8th May, 1954;

Notes, however, that many of these recommendations have not yet been implemented either in part or in full and that a number of participating Governments have not informed the Secretary-General of I. C. A. 0. whether or not they are prepared to implement them and, if not, the reasons for their attitude ;

Recommends to the Committee of Ministers :

1. that all Member Governments should, as a first step towards substantial simplification of formalities at airports, accept and implement without further delay the recommendations of the ICAO Conference held in Strasbourg from 21st April to 8th May, 1954;
2. that they should carry out with particular vigour the far-reaching enquiry proposed in ICAO Recommendation No. 24 (which is reproduced in the Report of the Committee on Legal and Administrative Questions appended hereto) with a view to making it as simple to board an aircraft as it is to get on a train at a railway station, and that they should communicate to the Assembly the results of these enquiries ;

Passenger Service Charges

1. See 24th Sitting, 25th October, 1955 (Draft Recommendation adopted) and Recommendation 85.

Considering that a charge of five shillings has been imposed at United Kingdom State airports since 1st May, 1952 on passengers leaving for foreign destinations;

Considering that in accordance with regulations issued in October, 1954, and amended in December, 1954, similar charges are imposed at certain French airports on a sliding scale varying from three hundred to twelve hundred francs according to the airport of departure, the amount of the fare and the place of destination;

Considering that, though imposed on operators of international air services, these charges have been passed on to their passengers;

Considering that other countries, in addition to France, the United Kingdom, Poland, Portugal and Spain where they are now imposed, may be led to introduce similar charges,

Finds that the practice of collecting such charges independently of the published fare is contrary to the best interests of air transportation, as it leads to irritating delays and inconvenience to passengers;

Recommends to the Committee of Ministers as a matter of urgency that France and the United Kingdom should forthwith take appropriate steps to ensure that airline operators include airport passenger service charges in the published fare if the Governments of these States arc unable'to do away with such charges altogether.

Report of the Committee on Legal and Administrative Questiojis on the simplification of formalities at airports

1. On 23rd September, 1953 the Assembly, having adopted Recommendation 51 on the simplification of passport, customs and currency formalities, instructed the Committee on Legal and Administrative Questions to keep the question of the simplification of frontier formalities for travellers under review and to submit, in due course, any further recommendations it considered desirable. This Order of the Assembly M'as renewed on 24th May, 1954, when Recommendation 59 was adopted by the Assembly.

2. In accordance with these instructions, the Sub-Committee on the simplification of frontier formalities for travellers[2]after making initial enquiries concerning the work of international organisations in this field, decided to consider the possibility of simplifying formalities at airports and appointed M. Hermocl Lannung as Rapporteur on this question.

3. It is recalled that on 6th December, 1951, when the late Count Jacini introduced his Motion in the Consultative Assembly (Document 98-1951), which has provided the basis for all the work of this Sub-Committee, he stated : " The minor point to which I draw the attention of the Assembly, and which is the subject of a Resolution that 1 and some friends have presented, can be settled quickly if the relevant services do not object. It is merely the simplification of frontier formalities at land frontiers and at airports, for the ordinary traveller ". Later, when formally moving his Resolution, Count Jacini again emphasised : " I have used the word 'frontier' but I refer also to airports. "

4. The action of your Committee's Subcommittee in this matter is prompted by a very real feeling that the procedure for handling passengers travelling by air is antiquated and should be streamlined and brought up to date. It is a curious reflection that red tape should be so conspicuous a feature of the most modern and progressive means of transport. To take an example, it is felt that the numerous hostesses and other guides shepherding passengers at airports to make sure that they do not stray are not absolutely necessary. Instead of the minimum of fuss and trouble and the maximum of speed, passengers are invited to follow one person and then another, to wait and rest in lounges, etc., all these operations being conducted at a leisurely pace as if they were part of a time-honoured ceremonial. There is a general feeling in the Committee that many stages in this ritual can be eliminated. The aim of the airport operators should be to take such steps as are necessary to make it as easy to board an aircraft as it is to get on a train at a railway station. Where appropriate, sign-posts and coloured lights such as arc to be found in the London Underground could easily take the place of hostesses and other officials. A serious attempt at simplifying formalities at airports would, moreover, result in substantial economies. As for the question of safety we have the authority of Sir William Hildred who in his report at the Tenth Annual General Meeting of the International Air Transport Association said " I would be remiss if I did not make the point that the regulations of air transport can, if there is a will, be made simpler and less expensive without the slightest harm to the public safety and with definite advantage to the public interest ". Such are the general practical considerations which have brought your Committee to assert that the formalities at airports are capable of being speeded up. Your Committee does not claim to have examined the

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2. Members of the Sub-Committee are : MM. Lannung (Denmark) (Chairman); Paget (United Kingdom), Pinton (France) (Vice-Chairmen); Burger (Netherlands), Codacci Pisanelli (Italy), Crosbie (Ireland), Giines (Turkey), Kopf (Federal Republic of Germanyj, Schaus (Luxembourg), Ström (Norway).

sometimes complicated technical reasons for a particular formality. It has proceeded largely on the basis of impressions— the clear impression that everybody's time is needlessly wasted at airports. It is time that improvements were not only discussed but actually put into practice.

5. Your Committee has on numerous occasions firmly stated that it wished to avoid duplication of effort and overlapping with international organisations. This did not imply, however, that whenever in its view insufficient action was being taken or whenever by reason of its structure the Council of Europe was thought to be more likely to achieve quicker results, your Committee would not make detailed proposals and insist that Governments should adopt a more progressive outlook on these problems. This policy was followed by your Committee when Recommendations 51. and 59 were tabled in the Assembly.

6. As regards the question of the simplification of frontier formalities at airports, it appeared particularly desirable that your Committee should examine most carefully the results of the important Conference on coordination of air transport in Europe, which took place in Strasbourg at the scat of the Council of Europe, from 21st April to 8th May, 1954. This Conference was convened pursuant to a Resolution of the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organisation adopted on 15th December, 1953, and in response to a Resolution of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted on 19th March, 1953. The Conference adopted a Report of substantial dimensions which was submitted to the Council of I. C. A. 0. and transmitted to the Council of Europe. The Governments of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, the Federal Republic of Germany; Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom were represented by full delegations. Greece and Iceland, likewise invited to attend the Conference, were unable to send delegations; The Argentine, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Ethiopia, Honduras, Israel, Japan and the United States of America were represented by observers. A number of governmental and non-governmental organisations were also represented by observers and, among them, the Air Research Bureau whose headquarters are at Brussels. The basic items on the Agenda of the Conference were :

a. Methods of improving commercial and technical co-operation between airlines of the countries participating in the Conference

b. The possibility of securing closer co-operation by the exchange of commençai rights between those European countries.

7. A closer inspection of the documents of this Conference which, by courtesy of the International Civil Aviation Organisation, were made available to the members of your Committee's Sub-Committee and to the Secretariat of the Council of Europe, reveals that considerable time was devoted to the problem of " facilitation ", and, in its examination of this question, the Facilitation Committee of the Conference did not neglect the passengers' aspect of the problem. A wide survey was made, which established :

1. that it was to be feared that, with the continuous increase in the number of flights, the number of air passengers and the loading capacity of aircraft, more time will be needed for the purpose of unloading, loading and servicing unless more efficient methods are found for the carrying out of these operations;

2. that the importance of the problems varies from one airport to another, depending on the operations carried out, the lay-out of the airport, the amount of load taken on and off and the handling methods used;

3. that much can be done to ensure greater efficiency at airports and to simplify the numerous formalities for aircraft clearance;

4. that experience to date indicates that loading and unloading of baggage and cargo takes up a considerable part of the total time spent in the loading and unloading of aircraft;

5. that the part played by the immigration, customs, currency and public health inspection services does not normally affect aircraft ground-stop time materially. It is recognised, however, that existing traffic handling arrangements do, in fact, mean that a great amount of time is lost before, during and after operational and governmental inspection services are carried out.

8. After thorough discussions on these points, the plenary Conference adopted a number of Recommendations, which arc of immediate interest to the work of your Committee as they deal essentially with travellers rather than with aircraft. Your Committee takes this opportunity to state that it is regrettable that such an important Conference should have been limited, by its terms of reference, to making recommendations to the participating Governments. No draft conventions were prepared; nothing was clone which would limit the sovereignty of States in the interests of the European community as a whole. The paper results of the Conference consisted of a number of recommendations which tended to be couched in diplomatic terms inviting States to take certain measures. Happily, it would appear that that was not the sum

total of the positive results of this Conference, for a number of Delegations, and among them those of the Federal Republic of Germany and Denmark, aired proposals of great interest which were not, however, considered acceptable, for the time being at least, by all Delegations. But the fact that progressive solutions were proposed comes as a breath of fresh air to frequent air passengers. In this connection your Committee would like to place on record that, in its view, the time has come for the Governmerits to take decisions in this matter, and if, as does not appear improbable, the nineteen nations assembled at Strasbourg last year formed too large a framework for positive and far-reaching results to be achieved, then a smaller but more homogeneous circle, perhaps the fifteen Member States of the Council of Europe, or possibly only some of them, must be used.

9. Your Committee has thought fit to make certain comments on the following Recommendations of the ICAO Conference which deal principally with travellers.

(i) Abolition of visas

The Conference recommended that visas be abolished as soon as possible on a reciprocal basis, by means of bilateral agreements or other arrangements, for business or tourist travel between the countries invited to be members of the Conference (Recommendation No. 13).

Comments : This Recommendation reproduces earlier recommendations of the Assembly (cf. Recommendation 51) which have largely been successfully implemented.

(ii) Customs examination of departing air passengers

The Conference recommended :

a. that the States invited to be members of the Conference consider the possibility of using methods creating- the least possible inconvenience to passengers and airlines with respect to examination of baggage by customs on departure;

b. that the States referred to above inform I. C. A. 0. of the results of their studies and of their practical efforts towards the achievement of this aim by 15th September, 1954, so as to permit reference to this information at the next session of the Facilitation Committee (Recommendation No. 14).

Comments : This recommendation is complied with in Belgium, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Ireland, Norway and Sweden where there is either no customs inspection of baggage of departing air passengers or where such inspection is reduced to spot checks. The United Kingdom has said that in view of the importance of export licensing and exchange controls it cannot undertake at present to examine passengers' accompanied baggage except in their presence, so that they are available for questioning. Nor could the scale of examination be reduced to a spot check. Shortage of staff would prevent the adoption of the proposal for the examination of baggage while it is being accepted by the operators, especially as this would mean allocating customs staff to the various air terminals. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom is reported to be doing its utmost to implement this Recommendation. At present a normal load of 33 passengers is cleared through the customs departure control at London Airport in an average time of between six and seven minutes.

(iii) Omission of references to mail on the air cargo manifest

The Conference recognised that postal authorities were frequently not in a position to place mail bags in the hands of aircraft operators until a few moments before actual take-off time and that the need to make entries concerning mail on air cargo manifests at this late stage would become a cause of delay to aircraft.

The Conference adopted the following Recommendation: " that the States invited to be members of this Conference study the possibility of dispensing with the requirement for mail entries on the air cargo manifest and advise the Secretary-General of I. C. A. 0. of the results of their studies in this matter by 15th September, 1954 ."

Comments: Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden do not require mail to be entered on the air cargo manifest. Belgium has agreed that letter mail but not parcel post should not be covered by a manifest. France and Ireland are prepared to accept Forms AV.6 and AV.7 provided for under Article 26 of the Brussels Universal Postal Convention in lieu of a reference on the air cargo manifest.

Greece and the United Kingdom have stated that they cannot accept the suggestion that mail should no longer be reported on the cargo manifest. It is considered by these countries that it is insufficient merely to attach Forms AV.6 and AV.7 to the air cargo manifest.

Your Committee feels strongly that Greece and the United Kingdom should, like other European countries, abandon this requirement which has been proved to be not essential.

(iv) Public health inspection

The Conference recommended :

a. that the States invited to be members of this Conference grant freedom from sanitary control to aircraft and the traffic they carry when engaged in transport within Europe ;

b. that, to ensure the uniform and reciprocal application of the Recommendation, a group of European Public Health Experts should meet as early as possible in order to lay down the procedure and the rules for giving effect to the Recommendation ... (Recommendation No. 19).

Comments: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom have indicated that they would be prepared to implement this recommendation as soon as a group of public health experts has met and considered the matter in detail and that their present practices are such that a considerable degree of implementation of this recommendation has already been achieved.

(v) Temporary withdrawal of passports from air travellers for clearance purposes

The Conference observed with satisfaction that practically all European States indicated to the Conference that they do not impose this inconvenience on air passengers, or else that they are about to abandon such practice.

Comments: The practice of temporarily removing passports from passengers before the arrival of aircraft in order that they may be handed over to immigration officers is still current in Greece (and in Spain). It is quite unacceptable and should be discontinued forth-. with. It often leads to delays, as passports may be mislaid and time wasted when passengers try to recOArer their own passports from the immigration officers. The same practice which still survives in Italy (and Portugal) so far as aircrews are concerned should also be discontinued.

(vi) Elimination of presentation of passenger manifests

The Conference recommended that the States invited to he members of this Conference :

a. no longer require presentation of a separate passenger manifest on entry and departure of aircraft engaged in transport between European States after 1st January, 1955;

b. advise the Secretary-General of I.C.A.0. by 15th September, 1954, cither that they will be implementing this Resolution by 1st January, 1955, or the reasons why they feel unable to do so. He should in turn inform the officials of the relevant European FAL Regional Meeting. (Recommendation No. 21).

Comments: Belgium, Denmark, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have implemented this Recommendation. Greece has not done so. Ireland has stated that this Recommendation cannot be adopted at present, but it may be possible to adopt it at least in part at a later stage. The United Kingdom has explained that when the structural restraints at airports in the British Isles are sufficient to ensure that all passengers automatically pass through the immigration control and hand in the embarkation/ disembarkation card (as they are at seaports where the restraints have been provided by shipping companies), then the United Kingdom Government would be prepared to abolish passenger manifests for European traffic at named airports on stated conditions.

(vii) General Question of Facilitation

The Conference recommended that each State invited to be a member of this Conference:

a. consider in detail, in co-operation with the airlines and airport operators, the present conditions of all technical and administrative formalities and operations taking place at its airports with a view to determining measures to save effort, time and installation and operation costs;

b. take into account in its detailed studies of this problem, the working papers submitted at this Conference, and of methods and practices applied in other means of transportation ;

c. endeavour as soon as possible to ensure that any treatment accorded to air transport at its airports is not less favourable than the treatment accorded to surface transport at its docks, or at its bus or rail frontier posts;

d. submit the conclusions of its studies, the measures adopted and the results achieved to the Secretary-General of I. C. A. 0. He should, in turn, inform the officials at the appropriate meeting of the European FAL Regional Board. As soon as its study of one phase of the problem has been completed, each State is requested to submit a report on it. In any event, each one of the participating States should submit a general progress report by 1st January, 1955, on what has been achieved up to and including October, 1954. (Recommendation No. 24).

Comments: Belgium and the Netherlands are still considering the matter. Denmark has stated that it has reached an advanced stage as regards facilitation measures. For example, the following steps have been taken in Denmark:

1. Direct transit areas have already been established. A direct transfer of passengers from one aircraft to another on two connected routes is likewise permitted;

2. In case of very short ground stops the Danish Authorities permit the passengers to remain on board the aircraft ;

3. The question of a sufficient number of passport and customs personnel for examination of the travelling public at the airports is closely being followed by the Danish Aviation Authorities. Owing to the present lay-out of the prémises for departing passengers, it has not yet been possible to allow the passengers to go oh board the aircraft one by one as they pass the passport and customs control;

4. The Danish Authorities do not require any documents from the operators in respect of passengers and freight in transit;

5. A Scandinavian committee has been set up for the purpose of reaching a joint Scandinavian arrangement of economic and traffic problems, etc. The Committee also deals with the question of exemption from customs duty in respect of ground equipment and the settlement of this question is expected in the near future;

6. Negotiations with the Postal Authorities have recently made it possible to bring into effect various time-saving arrangements.

The Federal Republic of Germany has stated that air transport is not accorded a treatment less favourable than the treatment accorded to surface transport at German docks or at bus or rail frontier posts.

Ireland and the United Kingdom have provided detailed information about the efforts being made to avoid delays which your Committee has examined. It has been ascertained in particular that fact-finding studies are carried out periodically, in particular at London airport, to ascertain causes of delay. These studies cover all aspects including passenger- handling arrangements.

10. Having recommended support for the valuable work of the Strasbourg ICAO Conference in 1954, your Committee feels bound to draw attention to certain problems which in its view deserve to be studied, and have not been studied sufficiently, especially from the point of view of travellers. It is greatly to be hoped that the Committee of Ministers themselves will consider these points and that in relevant cases they will adopt a common position and give appropriate instructions to their delegations to the European Civil Aviation Conference which is due to open in Strasbourg on 29th November, 1955.

11. First, your Committee believes that attention should be given to the situation created by the introduction of passenger service charges in the United Kingdom (1st May, 1952) and in France (October, 1954).

In the United Kingdom a charge of five shillings is imposed on passengers leaving for foreign destinations. In France similar charges are imposed at certain airports on a sliding scale varying from three hundred to twelve hundred francs, according to the airport of departure, the amount of the fare, and the place of destination. It is understood that these charges are imposed by the State on airline operators but they have chosen to pass them on to their passengers.

Your Committee strongly feels that it is particularly irksome to passengers to have to pay such charges at the time of departure from an airport, not only because they are thus called upon to pay sums in excess of the published fare, but because of the actual inconvenience of yet another formality and because they can hardly be expected to have the necessary change in the appropriate currency so near to the time of their departure.

It may well be that airport operators have legitimate cause to increase their revenue as otherwise the burden of maintaining airports would fall still more heavily on the taxpayer. But the passenger service charge as at present collected is a cumbersome way of doing so. It is probable that there would have been no objection if this charge had been included in the published fare.

Your Committee is most anxious that this charge, which is unknown in Western Europe except in France and the United Kingdom, should not be introduced anywhere else at least in its present form. It is thus recommended as a matter of urgency that France and the United Kingdom should forthwith take appropriate steps to ensure that airline operators include airport passenger service charges in the published fare if these Governments are unable to do away with such charges altogether.

Secondly, your Committee feels that the question might be considered whether in the case of services carrying large numbers of passengers, for example, between London and Paris, it would not be possible for immigration and customs officers of both the country of destination and the country of departure to carry out their examination of passengers at the airport of departure, thereby allowing passengers to disperse without further examination on arrival at their destination. It is clear, however, that such a practice could only be effective if the loading and unloading of baggage, which is one of the main causes of delay, were greatly speeded up. It is believed that such pre-flight clearance has been introduced in certain routes between the U. S. A. and Canada. Such a proposal would not be an unheralded novelty. It would merely apply to air traffic the provisions of the Convention signed in Geneva on 10th January, 1952, to facilitate the crossing of frontiers for passengers and baggage carried by rail. This Convention provides for the establishment and operation, whenever frontier formalities cannot be satisfactorily carried oui while the trains are in motion, of joint frontier stations.

13. Thirdly, airline operators should be invited to pool their resources to a greater extent than at present and to set up, for example, joint enquiry desks, joint booking olfices and joint facilities of all kinds at airports and in cities. Passengers, who usually choose air travel because of its speed, attach no importance at all to whether aircraft steps belong to one company or another, but they find it very inconvenient when an enquiry desk has no information to offer merely because it is staffed by only one company.

Moreover, there is no doubt that it is in the interests of all concerned, passengers, airlines and airport operators, to ensure that as much savings as possible arc effected.

14. Finally, your Committee feels that general time-tables in booklet form, giving details of all flights, by whatever company, are long overdue. At present only the individual airlines issue time-tables. Your Committee recommends as an urgent matter that regional time-tables showing all flights, for example, between Sweden and England, or between France and Turkey, should be made available to the public at an early date. Although this appears to be a minor matter, the issue of such time-tables would be of great help to air travellers.

15. This report was examined by the Committee on Legal and Administrative Questions on 18th October, 1955. It was adopted unanimously.