

Speech for the opening session of the twelfth Symposium on MRTD's
and the ICAO TRIP strategy

◆ Montreal, 15 November 2016 ◆

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organisers for the invitation to speak, on behalf of the European Commission, in this opening session for the twelfth Symposium on MRTD's and the ICAO TRIP strategy. This yearly event is an opportunity to exchange views on a wide range of issues covered by the ICAO TRIP strategy, which are of common interest to us all.

Let me start by presenting briefly the state of affairs in the European Union.

We are all confronted with a global migration crisis. We have seen a massive movement towards the EU of asylum seekers and others and this movement is still continuing. The EU and its Member States also face several new and complex security threats.

The European Agendas on Security and on Migration, adopted by the Commission as an immediate response on 28 April 2015 and 13 May 2015 respectively, identified as long term priorities the fight against terrorism and cross-border crime, managing borders more efficiently and the improvement of information exchanges and operational cooperation between law enforcement authorities.

The nomination of a specific Commissioner dealing with security matters will allow focusing and integrating even more different aspects of security at EU level.

Several urgent measures to deal with these challenges have already been introduced or are on its way.

An EU Regulation to set up a new **European Border and Coast Guard**, replacing FRONTEX, has been agreed by the European Parliament and Council in a record time of 9 months. The new legal basis specifically acknowledges that the Agency's operational activities may involve the specific elements of humanitarian emergencies and rescue at sea.

At the same time, the Commission presented a proposal which will provide for systematic checks of EU nationals when they cross the external border against databases on lost and stolen documents in order to verify that those persons do not represent a threat to public order and internal security. It also includes the possibility of biometric checks of EU citizens at the border in case of doubts.

It is also very important that the Interpol SLTD database is updated and consulted in a timely and systematic manner by all States. Only in this way we can avoid that travel documents are being re-used for fraudulent purposes.

The effective management of the external borders of the Schengen area and cooperation with third countries are top political priorities for the EU, not only for migration management reasons but also for reasons of security, especially after the recent terrorist attacks.

Strong external borders also play a key role for the free movement in the Schengen area, which is one of our dearest achievements. Border control needs to offer both, efficiency and security.

In its Communication on ‘Stronger and Smarter Information Systems for Borders and Security’ the European Commission announced last April measures to enhance electronic document security and ID management to strengthen the fight against document fraud.

In a further Communication issued last September on “Enhancing security in a world of mobility” the Commission highlighted the importance of document security to prevent abuses and threats to internal security. It was also underlined that “better management of free movement, migration and mobility relies on robust systems to prevent abuses and threats to internal security through failings in document security.”

It is therefore crucial to improve the overall security of travel documents used for identification and border crossings. Document security makes an important contribution to the development of an effective and genuine Security Union.

Since the start of the migratory crisis, the number of false ID, travel and other personal documents coming to notice has increased exponentially, both in the context of irregular migration and in relation to trafficking of human beings. Moreover, criminal groups supply any false documents that are required (and paid for) including: identity documents (passports, travel documents, ID cards), diplomas, driving licences, and currencies. People whose asylum requests are rejected may also try to stay in the EU on the basis of false documents.

We have also observed an increased misuse of Syrian passports in order to have a higher chance of getting refugee status.

As we all know, Document Fraud occurs at all stages when travel documents are involved and not just when crossing borders. ICAO has already identified in its TRIP strategy, that one should look at the whole Identity chain (ID chain), which is the system based on the life situations when the establishment of a person's identity is required.

We are all well aware that secure documents depend on a reliable and solid identity infrastructure. It all starts with checking the authenticity and integrity of breeder documents at registration and finishes with checking the identity of the document holder at the control environment, mostly at borders.

So far, the Commission efforts have mainly focused on the document itself and on border control, for the simple reason that in those areas the EU has legislative competence. We have also supported research in other areas such as breeder documents. You may well remember the findings of the “FIDELITY” programme. These findings are very relevant and should be followed up. Especially, -just to name two- the proposal on secure breeder documents and the identification of morphing as a new threat need an urgent answer.

We are continuously upgrading the security of the two documents under EU legislation, the uniform format for visas and the residence permit for third country nationals. The Commission presented two proposals for a new visa sticker and a redesigned residence permit for third country nationals. We hope that they will be adopted soon, so that the technical specifications can be established and the new documents brought into circulation to prevent further fraud cases.

Travel document verification relies on often time-consuming visual inspection of optical security features on the document, which requires specialised training and expertise. The use of electronic data on a chip creates a secure travel document that can be authenticated electronically, paving the way for the use of automated processes. However, visual inspection of the optical security features remains necessary in cases, where the electronic reading of the chip fails, as the document is still considered to be a valid travel document and

electronic verification should complement and not replace the visual inspection of the document.

Electronic verification of the authenticity of travel documents is an essential component of the EU future Entry Exit System. A legislative proposal to establish such a system is currently being discussed in the Council and the European Parliament. The general policy objectives pursued by the Entry Exit system are to improve the management of external borders, to reduce irregular migration by addressing the phenomenon of overstaying, and finally to contribute to the fight against terrorism and serious crime and ensure a high level of internal security within the European Union. But to record entries and exits correctly of what we call "Third Country Nationals", meaning persons without a passport issued by a European country, the underlying condition is to have the traveller's identity established and this is can only be done using electronic verification.

Without such electronic verification, it will be impossible for non-EU travellers to use e-Gates or self-service kiosks. However, electronic authentication of all travel documents is also required, both for the purposes of security and for the facilitation of border crossings.

For those countries issuing electronic travel documents and sharing their authentication certificates, it is impossible for fraudsters to create a false document, even when they use (stolen) blanks. In such cases it would be very easy to detect false/fraudulent passports, ID-cards or Residence Permits via an electronic authentication.

We promote participation in the ICAO-PKD, not least by providing financial support for Member States to join the PKD. But it is important to bear in mind that the ICAO Masterlist is not yet operational and States rely on national Masterlists for gathering of

certificates, which are crucial for checking the authenticity of the travel document.

The Commission started a pilot project in 2015 to explore how to collect CSCA certificates for the whole EU and Associated Schengen States, validate their trust level and subsequently share these certificates in the form of a masterlist, which is defined in an ICAO specification. As of 2017, this 'masterlist' (or comparable national masterlists) could simplify and further promote the electronic authentication of travel documents for all Member States. As we will be also become a member of the ICAO PKD for the EU Laissez-passer, we will certainly share our masterlist in the ICAO PKD.

However not all **non-EU travel** documents include biometric identifiers and those who issue e-documents do not always share their certificates, not to speak about the registration and issuing processes. We do not know how people are registered in third countries and how easy it is to get breeder documents which enable to apply for travel documents. The identification of persons is one of our biggest challenges. Even in the EU Member States, the registration and issuing systems are still quite different for historical or other reasons. We know that ICAO looks into the evidence of identity process. We all know that this is not an easy task but work should continue and you can count on our support.

In this context, the EU is also establishing cooperation with third countries to promote and support proper population registration systems, if possible with biometric identifiers. Systems of this kind would help people to be securely identified throughout their whole lives, be it for issuing travel documents or for other purposes.

Looking at the whole identity chain, further work should be done regarding enrolment standards and procedures and inspection systems. Proper enrolment of biometric features is crucial for a reliable matching. If the facial image or the fingerprint is not properly taken in the first place, the person may be rejected by an automated border check later on. Therefore it is necessary to look at the standards and procedures to improve the matching and to fight fraud such as morphing.

It is also important to look at inspection systems: we developed globally interoperable travel documents but can they be properly read by all inspection systems? We understand that ICAO intends to work on this issue and we are more than happy to contribute with our experience.

I would like to finish my talk by mentioning two other major initiatives, which will be presented this year:

Tomorrow a proposal for a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) will be adopted by the Commission. Similar to existing systems in Australia, Canada and the U.S., the purpose of ETIAS is to assess in advance of their actual arrival at the border the eligibility of visa-exempt travellers to cross our external borders and, in particular, whether their presence would represent a security threat. ETIAS will introduce an additional layer of systematic control compared to the current situation (without ETIAS) by allowing for early checks against relevant databases and assessment of the security, irregular migration and public health risk. While these checks are already routinely conducted in the visa-issuance process, no information was recorded on visa-exempt travellers. ETIAS is intended to close the "information gap" on these travellers.

Second, the Commission will issue on 7 December a Communication on an Action Plan with specific actions to be taken by Member States and European Institutions according to their legal competences in order to improve the overall security of travel documents. We will look in particular at better information exchange on lost and stolen documents but also at what can be improved as regards breeder documents and issuing processes.

The performance of systems is conditioned by the quality of data it contains, hence Member States should pay strong attention to document issuance processes and other data entries for example lost and stolen documents in order to make full use of existing systems – such as the Schengen Information System, the Visa Information System, EURODAC and Europol databases.

We need to address these issues in a global manner and work together.

The fight against document fraud is a global challenge. Therefore close cooperation and information exchange with third countries, international organisations such as Interpol, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and other key stakeholders is essential to achieve results.

Thank you very much