

ICAO NINTH SYMPOSIUM AND EXHIBITION ON MRTDs, BIOMETRICS AND BORDER SECURITY

(Montreal, 22 to 24 October 2013)

Opening Remarks

Mr. Ilkka Laitinen, Executive Director, European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex)

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

I would like to start by thanking ICAO for inviting me to open this Symposium in representation of Frontex, the European Union Agency responsible for coordinating the management of the EU external borders.

One of Frontex' key tasks is to follow, and also to contribute, to research and developments relevant to border security. It is within this context that for a number of years Frontex has been cooperating with ICAO under the scope of the ICAO-led Machine Readable Travel Documents Programme, a cooperation which we value very highly.

Frontex has also been particularly active in promoting greater harmonisation and interoperability in the field of Automated Border Control. Our Best Practice Guidelines on ABC have become a "soft standard" in this area and are widely used by national authorities in the EU Member States and beyond, as well by industry, standardisation bodies and other stakeholders.

It is thus truly a pleasure for me to open this event that will explore the latest developments concerning these important areas of border management: identification management, travel document security and ABC systems.

Let's have a look first to the security of travel documents. This is undoubtedly one of the cornerstones of effective border management, irrespective of whether border checks are carried out manually or by automated means. However, by attenuating the human element central to manual border checks, ABC systems depend even more heavily on the reliability of the automated document inspection process.

The soundness of the electronic travel document, the inspection of the machine readable zone, the reading of the chip, the availability of the requisite up-to-date certificates: if one of the elements in this constellation does not perform appropriately, the security of the whole process will be undermined.

In 2011 Frontex published a study on the "Operational and Technical Security of Electronic Passports". The study establishes an inventory of security relevant issues in the context of the application for, production and use of electronic passports in Europe, and proposes a set of recommendations to redress existing security gaps.

These and other important subjects were also discussed two weeks ago, during the 2nd Global Conference on future developments of Automated Border Control solutions which Frontex organized in cooperation with the European Commission on 10-11 October 2013 in Warsaw.

When Frontex first decided to organise a global event on ABC in 2012, the objective was to go beyond the existing sectoral and regional approach in order to provide a platform to launch an international dialogue on ABC-related issues among all relevant stakeholders and to foster a discussion on a comprehensive way forward.

We need a global approach because ABC deployments are multi-stakeholder projects and as such they call for close cooperation between different actors in order to succeed: the border management authority who is responsible for operating the systems; the airport operator who provides the space where the solution is installed; the industry, which supplies ABC solutions and, together with the research community, drives innovation forward; and, of course, let's not forget the passenger, who should be at the heart of the process.

In addition, ABC is gaining ground worldwide. Currently there are ABC systems in thirty-eight countries and one hundred airports. In the EU, thirteen Member States have already implemented ABC systems at their borders, and there are a number of countries who are planning to install these solutions in the near future.

I am very pleased to say that, for the second consecutive year, the Conference has proved a success. More than two hundred representatives of EU Member States and agencies, non-EU countries, international organizations, industry and academia gathered to discuss topical issues in the fast-changing world of ABC.

Allow me to give you a quick overview of some of the key conclusions that were reached:

Firstly, there is a common understanding that growing travel flows and changing travel patterns are placing the traditional model of border control under pressure. International traveller flows are on the rise. For instance, a recent IATA Forecast estimates that passenger numbers worldwide will grow more than 5% annually in the period 2012-2016.

We are thus confronted with a dilemma. Clearly, we all share an interest in ensuring that the vast majority of travellers, who are *bona fide*, are able to cross the border in a smooth manner, while we also expect our borders to prevent unauthorized entry. However, hiring additional staff is not a realistic option in the current context of financial constraint.

State-of-the-art technologies, such as ABC, can help us achieve more effective border management in this challenging environment. However, technology is not, and should not be, an end in-itself but a means at the service of policy objectives – including security of course, but also greater openness.

Secondly, social acceptance and trust are key factors for the successful deployment of biometric solutions, including ABC technologies.

Trust is very hard to build and very easy to break. In this very sensitive area, citizens need to be confident that their biometric data is being handled properly and that their rights to data protection and privacy are fully respected.

Thirdly, harmonization and standardization are still a challenge. As I said, the deployment of ABC systems worldwide has expanded in recent times, but so far this expansion has taken place in a disconnected manner.

This poses difficulties for travellers – how can they familiarize with ABC systems when national implementations differ so widely? Greater harmonization should help achieve a better traveller experience and encourage more people to use ABC.

Fourthly, and I am very keen in stressing this, well-trained border management staff continues to be as important as ever. ABC is not about replacing border guards with a computer, it is about giving a computer to border guards to help them do their work better.

Finally, clearly ABC is not enough – it is only one step of the travel process. The future lies with integrated solutions, including ABC but also other risk-based facilitation initiatives, within a broader border management concept.

All these trends present opportunities, but also challenges - for national border management authorities, for Frontex and for our international partners. Clearly, tackling these challenges calls for dynamic leadership and effective cooperation. I sincerely believe that in the future Frontex and ICAO will continue to have an important role to play in providing this leadership and fostering such cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

I wish you a fruitful Symposium.

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