



Airline security rules: are we safer or have they gone too far?

In August the European Commission finally issued a list of what you can and can't take on planes. The list was initially compiled in 2003 and covers everything from banning liquids in amounts over 100 millilitres to golf clubs and scissors. It also sets out the powers of airports to search passengers - including removal of clothing. Are the measures justified or are they too much? We talk to two MEPs - one who supports them and another worried about civil liberties.

Do you find these basic standards on aviation security sufficient?

British Conservative MEP Philip Bradbourn is Vice-Chair of Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee. "The problem is how those rules are actually applied by aviation authorities. The new proposal that came through on aviation security was to have almost a one-stop shop throughout Europe, so that people were not unduly inconvenienced, but that, of course, relies on the whole of the EU airport industry, actually applying the existing rules consistently and safely".

Spanish Liberal MEP Ignasi Guardans: "The standards are both too safe and not safe enough; there is never 100% security in anything, and some of them are based on unproven statements. In my opinion, the whole issue of liquid prevention is a sort of show to give an impression of security, which has no substantial evidence. Of course, if you forbid cars near airports, you will prevent a car bomb, but that does not mean that it is proportional, that it is intelligent to do that".

Have you ever experienced an incident at an airport or found security overbearing?

Bradbourn: "Some airports manage the security process very efficiently and effectively because they have the right number of staff, they have the right amount of equipment, so the passengers are not inconvenienced unduly. In other airports there never seem to be the right number of staff to deal with passengers.

It is not the security itself that is overbearing, because it's needed, it's how that security is implemented. It's not only staff, but having the right equipment and equipment that actually functions at peak periods...It's about planning the equipment so that people are not inconvenienced, not more than they have to be for the necessary reasons, obviously to make sure that the aircraft flies safely. I never felt it to be overbearing. I always say that I would rather be safe at 35,000 feet than not".

Guardans: "I had one in Spain which I brought to a judge. It was an abuse of authority mostly based on the fact that the regulation was secret until some days ago. This fact would allow every single police officer throughout Europe to decide when to search you; some are implementing rules that have no legal basis at all. Like the shoe issue;

there is no legal basis in European law to force a passenger to remove shoes before going through the metal detector.



In European airports people are forced to accept things they would never accept in any other place. It is as if the police ask you to dance in Trafalgar Square to check if you are drunk. Nobody would accept that because that is not the way to do it. In airports, under the pretext of security and with a secret regulation, police officers could do whatever they wanted. The European Commission has a huge responsibility for having kept the rules secret and for introducing some irrational, unpractical rules. And EU members have a huge responsibility for not implementing the rules, now that they are published, in a proper and rational way".

What do you think should be the attitude of passengers at security checks?

Bradbourn: "I think they have to understand that given the threats that we face in Europe and elsewhere these days, a level of security is going to be required, basically to keep them safe. It's frustrating when you're kept in a queue, but that's not because of the requirement for security itself, it's the way it is implemented. I think basically most people understand now that they have to go through these checks. Sometimes there is an inconsistency between different Member States of the EU as to how that threat level is assessed and whether you need to heighten security".

Guardans: "Passengers should know that airports are not an exception to democracy. They have the same fundamental rights in front of an airport police officer that they have when they are in the middle of the street, which means they have to protest any attitude that is not covered by the law; only what has a specific legal coverage can be required from you. Unfortunately, when people travel they are under stress and the only thing they want to do is to take the flight, and they are prepared to waive rights that normally they would not. Citizens should be able to contest; maybe take a photograph, or be able to identify any security officer by the number of the badge".