

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3855/03

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to the Commission

Subject: Airport security

Our lives have changed radically since 11 September 2001. Fear of terrorist attack has become part of our daily lives and consequently public safety measures have been stepped up in our cities and in high-risk key facilities such as airports.

As the present time is, unfortunately, typified by almost daily acts of terrorism, such as the attacks in Turkey and Iraq, the safety of the public is an issue of prime concern. The following recent experience was, therefore, instructive.

A few days ago, the authors of this question travelled to Brussels airport together. After going through the usual check-in procedures and having our hand-luggage checked, we still had time to have a meal in one of the restaurants in the departure lounge. We were somewhat taken aback to see that travellers could help themselves from an array of sharp, pointed knives. Obviously, a potential hijacker could pocket one before proceeding through the departure gate and boarding. There were no further checks of our hand luggage or persons. A potential terrorist - however unprepared - would have no trouble in hijacking an aircraft. Furthermore, we realised that if a passenger checked in electronically at the appropriate desk, nobody would check his passport either at the initial checkpoint at the entrance to the departure lounge or at the point where hand-luggage was checked. Consequently, a terrorist would have no difficulty getting on board an aircraft at the airport in Brussels, the European city that is the seat of so many institutions and offers so many targets for terrorists. So much for 'security'.

Would the Commission state its views on this state of affairs?

Does the Commission envisage mandatory security standards for airports?

If not, what does the Commission intend to do to ensure that such standards are introduced in the interests of public safety?