

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2542/09
by Elizabeth Lynne (ALDE)
to the Commission

Subject: Equal treatment for Sikhs at European airports

Turbans are an article of faith for practising Sikhs, which means they are treated and worn with reverence and respect. Not only is it unacceptable for them to be taken off in public, but it is a matter of respect and hygiene that they are treated with care.

At Brussels National Airport (Zaventem), Sikhs are required to remove their turbans after passing through security scanners, according to airport rules.

At every other European airport, rules are satisfied by security checking turbans using a hand-held scanner, rather than requiring Sikhs to remove their turbans. This means that a Sikh can arrive in Belgium from another European state, and travel between other European Member States, subject to one level of checks, but must leave Belgium according to a different level of security.

Does the Commission not agree that requiring a Sikh to remove his turban at Brussels airport is a disproportionate response to the potential security threat, given the practices of other European states, the availability of other means of ensuring security, and the extreme offense caused to the religious beliefs of those of Sikh faith?

What pressure will the Commission bring to bear on the Belgian authorities in order to stop the practice of requiring Sikhs to remove their turbans at airport security scanners, and harmonise Belgian practice with that of other European authorities?