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Subject: Airports in United Arab Emirates - an emerging hub for migration?
- Trends and challenges

Delegations will find attached the partially declassified version of the above-mentioned document.



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NOTE

From: Presidency

To: Working Party on Frontiers/Mixed Committee
(EU-Iceland/liechtenstein/Norway/Switzerland)

Subject: Airports in United Arab Emirates - an emerging hub for migration?
- Trends and challenges

1. Background

In order to comply with Council Regulation 377/2004, the Luxembourg authorities responsible for immigration are required to prepare a restricted report on immigration issues with the active cooperation of relevant Immigration Liaison Officers.

During the last semester of 2014, the Italian Presidency and the Commission triggered an in-depth strategic debate on the network of Immigration Liaison Officers. They concluded that it is still underused when it comes to its potential to contribute to the effective implementation of migratory policies. In order to reboost the network, the European Commission identified concrete measures which would allow making a better and more targeted use of the network (13128/14).

The Presidency has taken into account these recommendations and aims at a better and more strategic use of its reporting obligations and findings.

In the light of article 6(1) of Council Regulation 377/2004 which states that “*the selection... of the specific countries and/or regions of particular interest to the Union shall be based on objective migratory indicators such as statistics on illegal immigration and risk analysis and other relevant information reports prepared by Frontex...*”¹, the choice and title of this report arose from the statistical evidence and after discussion with the European Commission and Frontex. Additionally, informal meetings with a number of Immigration Liaison Officers in Abu Dhabi in the beginning of November 2014, discussions with Europol, Interpol, the International Organisation for Migration and a few available airlines took place in the first months of 2015. The choice hence has been a fact based neutral decision.

The Commission Decision 2005/687/EC regarding the format for the report on the activities of immigration liaison officers networks and on the situation in the host country in matters relating to illegal immigration states that *the format of the report and its questionnaire should include the topics of illegal immigration, smuggling and trafficking of human beings, external borders and the return of illegal residents.*

On 16 February 2015, the tailored questionnaire was forwarded to the Immigration Liaison Officers as well as their capitals. At the end of the deadline, 14 questionnaires had been returned. In parallel and during the month of March, bilateral meetings took place with the authorities from the United Arab Emirates in Brussels in order to keep them informed about the methodology and the purpose of the report. In the same light, a letter has been sent out to the Emirati authorities in order to invite them to a bilateral meeting on 12 March 2015.

A draft of the report was presented in a meeting held by the Luxemburgish Directorate of Immigration in Abu Dhabi on 29 April 2015 in which ILOs and representatives from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and the United Kingdom were present as well as a representative from the Commission, Frontex and Interpol. The meeting pursued the objective aim of drawing a picture of the current situation at the air borders in the United Arab Emirates.

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 377/2004 of 19 February 2004 on the creation of an immigration liaison officers network [2004] OJ L64/1.

2. Report

It is the sheer volume of air traffic, of passengers and of connections to and from the airports of the United Arab Emirates which have set the baseline for this report. In fact, any airlines and any airports with a major global route network connected to further mobility hubs create opportunities for irregular migration in that they provide a greater variety of available routes.

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In the space of less than 30 years, the United Arab Emirates airports have become one of the world's largest civil aviation hubs. Situated within eight flying hours of two-third of the world's population, the United Arab Emirates airports and airlines offer a great connectivity of any airport and airline in the world. Experts expect air traffic in the United Arab Emirates to double by 2030, handling 5100 aircraft movements per day¹.

Most commercial passenger traffic to the European Union arrives from the three main international airports in the United Arab Emirates.

¹ S. Dīaa, *UAE aviation industry to contribute \$53b by 2020*, <http://gulfnews.com/business/aviation/uae-aviation-industry-to-contribute-53b-by-2020-1.1443145>, accessed: 16 April 2015.

Main hub for the Dubai state owned Emirates airlines, Dubai International Airport (DXB) occupies the pole position. It is nowadays the busiest international airport in the world, handling over 70 million passengers per year and set to handle around 98.5 million passengers in 2020. On the second rank follows Abu Dhabi International Airport (AUH), handling some 20 million passengers per year and being the hub for the Abu Dhabi opened Emirates airline Etihad airlines. The Dubai World Central Al Maktoum International Airport (DWC) is placed in third position, handling mainly cargo and some low cost airlines. However, it is undergoing an expansion with the intention of being able to handle some 100 million passengers a year within the next decade. It is to highlight that some Immigration Liaison Officers pointed out that Dubai World Central is not to be qualified as a hub yet.

Developing the power of connectivity to drive economies, Abu Dhabi and Dubai emirates have heavily invested in their aviation sector.

Emirates airlines have adopted a massive expansion program over the last 15 years that has had knock-on effects in the raised productivity of international airline manufacturers such as Boeing and Airbus Industry. The airline interestingly offers this high capacity to what may seem to be routes of marginal importance to cities in underdeveloped parts of Africa and Asia that are associated with high level of irregular migration and political instability. In recent years, the airline has expanded massively in Africa. Moreover, the airline has created a low cost carrier “Fly Dubai” which seeks to service some regional high density routes or airports where there is considered to be an inability for the Emirates airlines product to gain traction¹, like lack of capacity, overpriced seats, etc...

Emirates airline is flying from Dubai International Airport towards 23 destinations on the African continent and 19 countries (including namely Ethiopia, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt and Tunisia). In most cases there are one or two daily direct flights. Also from Dubai International Airport, Fly Dubai covers 13 destinations in ten countries of Africa (e.g. South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan, Egypt). There are daily flights to Sudan and Egypt and up to five flights a week to South Sudan, for example.

¹ Frontex - Risk Analysis Unit Sector 2 (2015).

Even if Etihad airlines have only been operating since 2003, it has undergone commensurate massive expansion in terms of size and route network in the last decade. In 2014, Etihad Airlines carried 23% more passengers compared to 2013; with a total of 14.8 million passengers¹. Etihad Airways has currently 21 destinations in 13 countries of Africa (including for example Morocco and Nigeria).

As already shortly hinted above, one major development witnessed over the last year is the expansion of low cost airlines flying to/from the airports of the United Arab Emirates. According to a handful of Immigration Liaison Officers, these are not of a particular interest to people living in the United Arab Emirates. Most active in the region, competitors Air Arabia² and Flydubai³ flew to around 200 destinations by the end of 2014^{4,5}. Over the last years, both airlines have increased the frequency of their flights, particularly to destinations in East Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Central and Eastern Europe, such as Sarajevo, Kiev and Chisinau. For example in 2014, Flydubai launched 23 new routes⁶, including flights to Alexandria (Egypt), Khartoum and Port Sudan (Sudan), Juba (South Sudan), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Djibouti (Djibouti), Bujumbura (Burundi), Entebbe (Uganda) and Kigali (Rwanda)⁷.

Abu Dhabi currently does not have its own low cost carrier yet but, following the Abu Dhabi Airports Company “it’s only a matter of time that low-cost carriers are set up in Abu Dhabi”⁸.

¹ Arab News, *Etihad Airways posts 23% passenger growth*, <http://www.arabnews.com/news/698431>, accessed: 16 April 2015.

² Main hub: Sharjah international airport.

³ Main hub: Dubai International airport.

⁴ A. Cornwell, *Abu Dhabi ready for a low-cost carrier*, <http://gulfnews.com/business/aviation/abu-dhabi-ready-for-a-low-cost-carrier-1.1287029>; accessed 16 April 16, 2015.

⁵ A. Buller, *Exclusive: Flydubai CEO On The Low Cost Airline’s Meteoric Rise*, <http://gulfbusiness.com/2014/12/interview-flydubai-ceo-low-cost-champions-rise/#.VQVYlo7F-z4>, accessed 16 April 2015.

⁶ A. Buller, *Exclusive: Flydubai CEO On The Low Cost Airline’s Meteoric Rise*, <http://gulfbusiness.com/2014/12/interview-flydubai-ceo-low-cost-champions-rise/#.VQVYlo7F-z4>, accessed 16 April 2015.

⁷ BDAfrica.com, *Low-cost airlines join scramble for East Africa traffic*, <http://www.businessdailyafrica.com/Corporate-News/Low-cost-airlines-join-scramble-for-East-Africa-traffic/-/539550/2437252/-/qsq10bz/-/index.html>, accessed 16 April 2015.

⁸ A. Cornwell, *Abu Dhabi ready for a low-cost carrier*, <http://gulfnews.com/business/aviation/abu-dhabi-ready-for-a-low-cost-carrier-1.1287029>, accessed 16 April 16, 2015.

The Sharjah-based low cost company Air Arabia, considered being the largest low-cost operator in the Middle East and North Africa, carried over 6.8 million passengers in 2014¹. The airline operates from five cities, including Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates. In 2014, the company launched a selection of new routes : departing from Ras al-Khaimah airport to Cairo (Egypt), Lahore (Pakistan), Islamabad (Pakistan), Peshawar (Pakistan), Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), Muscat (Oman) and Dhaka (Bangladesh) while the departures from Sharjah were enriched through destinations likes Cairo (Egypt), Samara (Russia), Abadan (Iran), Al Jouf (Saudi Arabia), Tbilisi (Georgia)².

Etihad Airways, Emirates and Air Arabia operate daily flights to the Ataturk International Airport in Istanbul or, in case of Air Arabia, to the International Airport of Sabiha in Istanbul. Their frequency ranges from one to two direct flights per day. Fly Dubai reaches Istanbul's International Airport of Sabiha five times a week.

Non-Emirati airlines have also jumped on the bandwagon and offer nowadays connection to/from Dubai. For example, since fall 2013, Hungarian-based Company Wizz Air offers direct flights to/from Dubai. Frontex has reported that recently undocumented Afghans have been specifically using the budget airline Wizzair on flights from Dubai World Central airport to arrive at Budapest³.

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¹ Sharjah Update, *Air Arabia 2014 net profit up 30%*, <http://www.sharjahupdate.com/2015/02/air-arabia-2014-net-profit-up-30>, accessed 17 April 2015.

² Air Arabia: <http://www.airarabia.com/en/route-launches>, accessed 17 April 2015.

³ Frontex – Risk Analysis Unit Sector 2 (2015).