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**Subject : International Airports Plan**  
– **Air Borders Centre project (Italy)**

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**I. Introduction**

The *International Airports Plan* project, approved by SCIFA+ on 16 September 2002, is the direct result of the *Feasibility study for the setting-up of a European border police force*; its aim is to establish a permanent joint system for improving border controls at Europe's international airports by using standardised checking procedures.

There have been six phases to the project, involving five meetings in Rome attended by the delegations of the eleven participating Member States (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Spain and Sweden) and of Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, countries with observer status.

At the beginning of September Finland joined the project.

Phase 6 of the project runs from 20 July to 30 November 2003 and is designed to test the operational principles agreed over the five earlier phases.

### **1.1. Results of the *International Airports Plan***

A special document (the *Rule Book* – see Annex to 8645/03 FRONT 41 COMIX 253) was drawn up during phase 5, providing a step-by-step description of procedures to be followed when exchanging information on document fraud and formulating practical instructions for border control procedures (*Practical instructions on border procedures*). In addition, a special communications system for exchanges between airport contact points was designed (the Eu.BIN project – European Border Information Network), and agreement was reached on an organisational model for air borders offices and on the profiles of the professionals needed to staff them.

Phase 6 is particularly important in that the operational principles identified in the earlier phases will be put into practice, with a trial run of the functionalities of the contact points' offices in international airports coordinated by the *International Airports Plan* Centre.

## **2. Air Borders Centre**

The Air Borders Centre (ABC) grew out of the work done under the *International Airports Plan*.

The ABC will develop the principles outlined in the documents that have been approved (*Rule Book* and its Annex the *Practical Instructions for Border Procedures*).

The ABC's remit includes examining, assessing and developing operational communications between the networked airports.

Those communications will be of two types : straight checking (of persons and documents) and the reporting of specific instances of illegal immigration across the air border.

On the basis of the analysis of the information thus collected, the ABC, in agreement with the Risk Analysis Centre, will draw up plans for joint operations with selected objectives.

Planning activity will use the most appropriate communications and security technologies.

## **2.1 Functionalities**

Like the Land Borders Centre, the Maritime Borders Centre, the Risk Analysis Centre and the Centre for Border Guard Training, the ABC is an key component of the network structure for which plans were laid in the Plan for the management of the external borders of the Member States of the European Union (10019/02 FRONT 58 COMIX 398).

The ABC's hallmark feature is its use of a computerised system for the exchange of data.

The ABC will, in addition, provide the following back-up tools for border control officers operating in member airports:

1. A computer system (Eu.BIN) (subsystem of ICONet) for:
  - (a) consulting the rules of any country in the world regarding the documents needed for entering the Community territory;

- (b) consulting early-warning alerts of cases of illegal immigration in other European Union airports;
  - (c) finding user-friendly message templates in English (these, too, will be tested in Phase 6 using "IAP e-Forms" software) to enable border control officers in international airports to consult each other (second level practitioners, as stipulated in the *Practical instructions for border procedures*) in other international airports.
2. Checklists of the procedural steps for the prescribed document checks at legally designated entry points (drawn up according to the *Practical instructions for border procedures*).
  3. Six-monthly risk analysis reports, which will be published by the Helsinki Risk Analysis Centre with data provided by the Rome Air Borders Centre on the basis of the early-warning alerts from the individual airports.
  4. A series of meetings to pool operational experiences and periodical/possible joint operations to provide support for experts in the airports considered by the Helsinki Centre to be current prime targets of illegal immigration.
  5. Operational documents reaching the Europol Directorate, including early warning alerts periodically forwarded by the Rome Centre, for use in stamping out offences connected with illegal immigration, document fraud etc.

The Air Border Centre's main tasks will be to monitor and evaluate data which are collected for the purpose of formulating legislative and operational proposals and which serve as the basis for evaluation reports and for organising joint operations.

## 2.2 Organisational and logistical aspects

The ABC will be located in offices at Rome's Fiumicino Airport and will consist of:

1. a Chief (Head of Border Police)
2. a permanent secretariat
3. a number of computer technicians
4. a group of up to six experts from the Member States.

Its premises will comprise: an electronic information clearing house (the communications/data centre), a meeting room, and offices for the experts, the secretariat/translation unit and the Head of the Centre.

The official language for communications and documents will be English.

Member States will appoint experts with specific knowledge of air border control procedures and adequate knowledge of computer systems. It is also recommended that experts should have an adequate knowledge of document forgery detection techniques.

## 3. Work management

At regular intervals (every six months), the heads of the main international airports of the Member States should meet to monitor the operations carried out to improve procedures and to devise other, more targeted measures.

The ABC will stay closely in touch with the *Risk Analysis Centre*, the *Centre for Border Guard Training* and with the other components of the network structure (Land Borders and Maritime Borders Centres).

#### **4. Possible developments**

The organisation of the ABC described above is only a first step in the broader development of the Centre. Ultimately the aim would be to link the Centre to other organisations to which it needs to refer in carrying out checks; this would involve providing for direct operational links with customs, airlines and airport management companies so as to ensure uniform security standards, bearing in mind the constant need to strike a balance between air border control policies and the emerging security requirements of air transport.

#### **5. Costs and financing**

*The International Airports Plan* was financed by the ARGO programme. For the Air Borders Centre, funding from Community participation or from other sources will need to be found to support the activities of the Centre itself and of countries involved in the Centre's initiatives.

#### **6. Proposal**

We intend to notify the starting date for sending experts to the International Airports Centre at the end of Phase 6 (31 December 2003).