

The Facilitation Sub-group on Immigration

Interview with **Evgheni Kostetki**
*Chair of the Sub-group on Immigration, State Liaison Officer
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ECAC Sub-group on Immigration considers the facilitation aspects of immigration issues. Its aim is to share experience and develop best practice on border control procedures and implementation matters such as inadmissible passengers and deportees, Automated Border Control systems (ABC), biometrics, Advance Passenger Information (API), interactive API, and Passenger Name Record (PNR). Evgheni Kostetki, who has been chairing the group since 2018, answers a few questions for ECAC News on the latest issues it has dealt with.

1. What is the FAL Sub-group on Immigration?

In the field of facilitation, ECAC has a range of working groups that deal with issues mainly arising from implementation of Part I of ECAC Doc 30: "Policy Statement in the field of Civil Aviation Facilitation". These issues include harmonisation of the provisions of Doc 30, Part I and similar EU regulations, as well as the applicable ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) from Annex 9 to the Chicago Convention. The groups also ensure that information and best practices are shared between the Member States in order to achieve harmonised and good working facilitation rules in all ECAC States to the maximum extent possible. The FAL Sub-group on Immigration, as one of the specialised groups in the ECAC system, in particular focuses on topics related to the immigration processes.

2. How does the sub-group relate overall to the Working Group on Facilitation and /or other groups working on this topic?

Within ECAC, the FAL Sub-group on Immigration regularly reports on its work to the Facilitation Working Group, which then provides the information to all ECAC Member States and observers. Based on the sub-group's report, the Facilitation Working Group defines an annual work programme, including immigration-related tasks and subjects, which are presented later to the Directors General of the national civil aviation authorities for their approval. Subject to due coordination between the Member States, proposals could be sent for further discussion in the ICAO Facilitation Panel for the development and improvement of ICAO SARPs and guidance material. In other words, the sub-group is a tool that aims to identify and support changes in immigration-related issues that need to be implemented, and help the whole system achieve these changes on a larger global scale.

3. What topics is the sub-group currently focusing on?

The FAL Sub-group on Immigration is quite unique of its kind. As the topic of immigration is not purely an aviation matter, our objective is to launch the dialogue not only between Member State experts from the civil aviation agencies, but also from the immigration, border and national enforcement bodies.

As you can imagine, this is both a challenging and an exciting experience. We try to keep our work extremely relevant to all the national authorities involved, and it requires a high level of involvement and commitment from the sub-group members.

Currently, the issues on the table for discussion within the sub-group include: implementation of the Entry/Exit System (EES) in the Schengen States and its impact for both EU and non-EU ECAC Member States; elaboration of the Passenger Data Exchange Systems recommendations to be included in ECAC Doc 30, Part I; the impact the implementation of Automated Border Controls (ABC gates) has on civil aviation in Europe; and many more. Our experts also contribute to defining the European priorities at the ICAO level.

4. What problems do you see arising for the future?

European – and notably EU – legislation in the field of immigration evolves quite fast. Thus, the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) will without doubt be one of the focuses of discussion for us, as it is expected to be operational by 2021 and will have a huge impact on ECAC Member States. We can also expect interesting discussions on the Smart Borders initiative and how it could be implemented throughout Europe.

Recently we have been examining the critical topic of safeguards against human trafficking that are expected to be in place for the future, especially as the

issue also covers the recommendations and rules on the travel of unaccompanied minors.

We are convinced that with the large number of authorities involved in regulating this topic at the national level in Member States, and the industry and passengers' interest in having clear, flexible yet protective rules and practices in place, this subject will remain a hot topic for the sub-group.

5. What about the surveys on API/PNR and on biometrics and ABC systems?

As I mentioned before, on the topics that are already occupying much of the debate for aviation-related immigration issues, we are making every effort to share experience and develop best practices, as well as to monitor how the development and application of new technologies can help Member States achieve their air transport facilitation goals. As the technological benefits are neither automatic nor a given, it is important to think about the coordinated and well-defined use of them. To this end, surveys are one of the tools we use to collect up-to-date information from Member States in order to have a precise global picture. Our experience has already proven that annual web-based surveys on immigration-related matters are a reliable and informative source to identify the issues

to be tackled. For this purpose, we encourage Member States to help us by replying to the surveys and other related requests from ECAC.

6. Some final words?

Because of the specific nature of the FAL Sub-group on Immigration, we encourage experts from both civil aviation authorities and other relevant State institutions to come and contribute to the discussions. We are looking forward to a more active participation from immigration and border control officers whose valuable opinion is very welcome at the sub-group meetings. It should be highlighted that ECAC actively encourages the involvement of non-EU States in the discussions in order to take on board a wider spread of needs and opinions. Our doors are open to new experts from Member States as well as to the participation of observer organisations. So far, we are proud to have already established a fruitful collaboration with ACI EUROPE and A4E and we will be making every effort to further expand collaboration with a large number of organisations. ■



Meeting of the FAL Sub-Group on Immigration in March 2019, Paris.

Evgheni Kostetki joined the national civil aviation authority of Moldova in 2005. He has been chief expert for international relations, responsible amongst others for implementation of the Moldovan National Facilitation Programme since 2007, and national continuous monitoring coordinator for ICAO's Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) and Continuous Monitoring Approach (CMA) activities in Moldova since 2009. Since 2017, he has been seconded to the European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation (EUROCONTROL) as the State liaison officer. On three occasions, Mr Kostetki has been included in the national delegation representing Moldova at ICAO Assemblies. Mr Kostetki was appointed as chair of the ECAC Sub-group on Immigration in 2018 having previously held the position of vice-chair for two years and having participated in the group for more than five years. He has a master's degree in international law and a degree in economics.