

Rebuilding Athens

from security pariah to security torch



From an aviation security perspective, mention Athens and one cannot fail to be reminded of some of the high profile attacks in our brief history. The Greek authorities have, quite naturally, been keen to put such incidents behind them and, sporting a brand new airport and with the city set to host the next Olympic Games in 2004, security is now equal to many of the best. **Philip Baum** flew in to report on the airport's odyssey from security pariah to security torch.

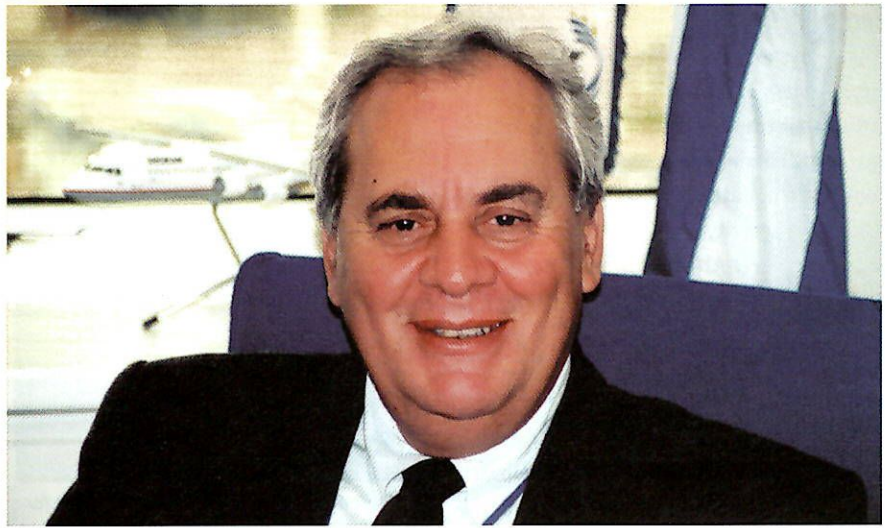
Athens International Airport (AIA), named Eleftherios Venizelos, oozes modernity and sophistication. Bright airy concourses equipped with the latest technologies and patrolled by uniformed security guards create a welcoming, yet secure environment, a far cry from the airport's predecessor at Hellinikon.

Spend a few days in the airport and one can appreciate the benefits of the public/private partnership that have ensured the initial success of AIA. It is the product of a cooperative effort between the Hellenic Republic, owning some 55%, and a German Consortium (Hochtief, ABB, Krantz/TKT and FAG), owning the other 45%.

The airport was built in the record time of 51 months and operations only began following a five-month period of operational testing.

Now a year old, having opened on March 28 2001, one could hardly say that they have had the easiest initiation. As CEO Dr. Matthias Mitscherlich says, "we opened in one of the most challenging years for the aviation industry as a whole given the events of September 11th, yet we coped far better than many predicted". Indeed, the results of an independent survey in July and August 2001 found the airport was even considered to be the "best tourist airport" in Europe.

The eyes of the world will be on Athens over the next two years as the Olympic Games return to their birthplace. Security, both at the games themselves and at the airport, will, no doubt, be under the microscope. The airport's management recognise this and are keen to learn from their colleagues in Sydney, hosts of the last summer games. Takis Tassopoulos, Director of Safety and Security, visited Salt Lake City in February to witness the arrangements made there for the Winter Olympics. The issue to be faced is not one merely of increased numbers of passengers travelling in a period of increased threat. One of the biggest security challenges they discovered was actually not the main games but the subsequent para-Olympics. Whilst the numbers participating and attending are smaller, the unusually high quantity of disabled passengers created problems at security checkpoints where physical searches had to replace magnetometer screening. Meanwhile, athletes' equipment, for both Olympics and para-Olympics, necessitates



Takis Tassopoulos, Director of Safety and Security at Athens International Airport

increased numbers of out-of-gauge screening. With many of the Olympians being of global celebrity status, the huge numbers of press corps and fans presented challenges with the airports public concourses rather than in the screening process. Yet forewarned is forearmed and Athens is well on the road to readiness for the world's biggest party during which an estimated 460,000 additional visitors are expected.

The other major security challenge lies within the vision of the Greek government to transform AIA into a major hub connecting Europe to the Middle East and Asia, which will result in significant numbers of transfer passengers and their associated baggage.

The Security Division

Much of the credit for the security development lies with Tassopoulos. His division is responsible for the security management of some 700 outsourced security screening and guarding personnel. This is achieved by the presence of three internal security auditors who supervise the passenger screening, baggage screening and access control operations respectively. One of the auditors, Voula Karachaliou, a former security Supervisor for Trans World Airlines operations in Athens, now responsible for passenger and hand baggage screening, acted as my guide throughout the visit.

Day to day management lies in the hands of the five Duty Supervisors. They in turn manage the supervisors of each area of operation who ensure the 65 hold baggage

screening operators, 235 access control and patrol guards, and approximately 400 passenger and hand baggage screening guards are performing their duties in accordance with the Airport Security Programme. Additionally, Tassopoulos' division issues airport ID cards and permits, conducts security training and has responsibility for airport safety management.

Tassopoulos believes "the key element for a successful and efficient airport security system is the Human Factor". With this as his premise, he has set out to develop a motivated, efficient and effective security force of both internal and outsourced personnel. Training is of the highest priority, and as such all those employed in security roles are required to successfully complete intensive programmes of instruction as follows:

Access Control & Guarding Positions

- 3 days at the airport
- 3 days with the Hellenic Civil Aviation Authority (HCAA)
- 15 days on-the-job training

Hold Baggage Screening Positions

- 3 days at the airport
- 8 days with the HCAA
- 10 days from AIA
- 15 days on-the-job training

Passenger/Hand Baggage Screening Positions

- 8 days with HCAA
- 8 days training from the 3D/ICTS/Wackenhut consortium
- 15 days on-the-job training

Security Effectiveness

It is always extremely difficult to define the effectiveness of an airport's security system until it fails. No one can determine exactly how many criminal, hijack or sabotage incidents were not attempted due to the deterrent of the security system in place. In that respect however AIA does present a totally different image to that of its predecessor. Whilst one hopes that they are not exploited, there are far easier targets in Europe.

The effect on the security operations at AIA post-September 11 can be demonstrated by the huge rise in the numbers of prohibited items being detected in the passenger and hand baggage (ie. not including hold baggage) screening process, as a result of the new security guidelines brought into effect thereafter.

April 2001:	745
May 2001:	884
June 2001:	1,216
July 2001:	1,734
August 2001:	2,134
September 2001:	6,038
October 2001:	23,651
November 2001:	22,538
December 2001:	30,337
January 2002:	21,557

In respect of January 2002, the figures can be broken down as follows:

Gases/Flammable Liquids:	329
Guns:	1
Knives:	2908
Toy Guns:	87
Ammunition:	84
Sharp Objects:	18132
Other:	16

For the sake of clarity, the detection of such items does not imply any intent by any individual or group to bypass the security process. In most cases such finds were simple errors by passengers being unsure of either what they could pack or what they had actually packed in their baggage.

Private Security Companies

It took a change in Hellenic Civil Aviation legislation back in March 2000 to open the doors to private security companies to provide security services at Greek airports. Until then all such controls were the



Voula Karachaliou, AIA's Security Auditor for Passenger and Hand Baggage Screening

domain of the Police. AIA is the first to go down this route, with many others keeping a close eye on the process before embarking on a similar process.

AIA put the security contracts out to tender and two bidders were successful in their attempts to win the contracts on offer. Hermes won the contract for Hold Baggage Screening and Access Control Guards and Patrols, whilst a consortium of three companies (3D, ICTS and Wackenhut) won the passenger and hand baggage screening contract. An interesting aspect of the bidding process was that interested companies had to have other contracts in Greece in order that, should the need arise, additional personnel could be drafted into airport operations. Indeed the requirement states that 60% of a company's manpower must be serving on other projects in Greece. In other words the Greek authorities were keen to ensure that the airport operations would not be affected by either a sudden increase in staff turnover or an epidemic of ill health, as well as having additional staffing cover available in the event of either a sudden increase in security requirements or the failure of the equipment that might necessitate large quantities of baggage to be physically inspected.

Hermes Security was established in 1984 and is the largest security company in Greece serving 130 non-airport sites in Athens alone. Combined with the fact that it is managed by Sissas Pavlos, a former Major General in the Greek Air Force,

Right: A Hermes guard controlling access to the airside at AIA

Hermes is ideally placed to manage the access control aspects of airport security.

The 3D/ICTS/Wackenhut consortium was brought together in order to combine aviation security expertise with the requirement that the bidding company have manpower employed elsewhere in Greece.

The consortium runs its own training above and beyond that given by the Civil Aviation Authority and utilises Insight (an ICTS product) computer based training for X-ray operator instruction and assessment. Managed by the charismatic Dimitris Skepastianos from offices off the airport, the partnership seems solid with each party knowing exactly what it brings to the table.

It could so easily have been a recipe for disaster, yet the players gel and there appears to be a genuine respect for Tassopoulos and Karachaliou. Equally, AIA seems to value the consortium and applaud its efforts to ensure that there is a highly competent and motivated first line of defence at the screening points.

Part of the plan to create the impression of an effective regime lay in the decision to design a uniform for the screeners that would convey a professional, customer service-orientated image. They turned to Greek fashion designer Nikos-Takis, whose chosen design did just that. Even the colour seems highly appropriate for a Greek airport.

The transfer to the new airport was smooth. For three months the first intake of new screeners and guards worked alongside the Police at the old airport, shadowing their



activities, to ensure task familiarity and competence when operations transferred to AIA.

Equipment

An array of the latest equipment grace AIA. There is a fully automated access control system using proximity cards, 265 CCTV cameras and TETRA communication equipment. Meanwhile the 32 passenger screening checkpoints are complete with Heimann 6040 and 7555 dual energy X-ray systems and a Heimann 100100 for out of gauge inspection, CEIA archway metal detectors and hand-held magnetometers.

The hold baggage system incorporates VIVID machines at Level 1 and InVision CTX 9000 Dsi machines at Level 3. One of the benefits of building a new airport at this time was that it could be designed to facilitate 100% hold baggage screening. From day one AIA has met the ECAC requirements for hold baggage screening to be introduced Europe-wide by the end of the year.

The airport is currently examining the



Passenger screening points at AIA are operated by a consortium (3D/ICTS/Wackenhut)

various options in respect of explosive trace detection equipment.

Conclusion

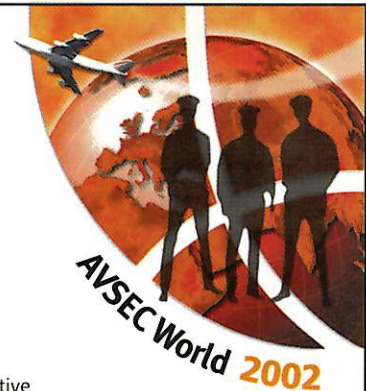
Sometimes one visits an airport and feels that security procedures are simply an inconvenience that the authorities seem to pay lip service to. In Athens, however, there seems to be a genuine will from Tassopoulos and his team to excel in security and to be

a beacon, in the true Olympic spirit, that others can follow and learn from. Athens has learned the hard way and is understandably keen to banish the demons of yesteryear.

Whilst no airport, including Athens, can guarantee that all unlawful acts perpetrated against civil aviation will be prevented, they can guarantee that all reasonable efforts are being taken and perhaps that's all one can ask of anyone. ☺



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