

# European airlines face crisis

## High number of flights are overloading air traffic control system

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Furnishing sushi bars and sex shops, Frankfurt Airport offers travelers plenty of ways to occupy their time before flying.

Yet there may be demand for even more: Nearly half of last month's flights to and from the airport were delayed at least 15 minutes and some were hours late.

The tardiness is so severe that Lufthansa AG has begun keeping three jets with crews on standby here just to fill in for flights that are seriously delayed. All three replacement jets have been busy, the airline says.

In skies across Europe, unprecedented numbers of passenger flights are overloading the region's fragmented air traffic control system.

A surge in flights packed with vacationers heading for the Mediterranean has added to the strain. Holiday travel increased just as the skies were clearing of disruptions caused by NATO's spring offensive in the Balkans.

"We have once again reached a crisis situation," said Emanuela Petracchi, a Geneva-based spokeswoman for the International Air Transport Association, an airline trade group.

Similar problems in the United States have contributed to a doubling of delays and cancellations by U.S. air-

lines in the past year.

At airports in 32 European countries, airline deregulation and cheaper fares helped boost the number of passenger flights to more than 734,000 in July, a 17.6 percent increase from three years ago. Delays due to air traffic problems have risen even faster, 33.5 percent in the same period, IATA says.

In Spain, a shortage of air traffic controllers caused delays earlier this year, and a strike by baggage handlers affected flights to the Canary Islands, a popular tourist destination.

Flights to Switzerland and southern France suffered delays after the French, fearing potential job losses, halted efforts to reorganize control of the airspace along the Franco-Swiss border, Petracchi said.

By the end of July, delays topped the list of complaints by passengers in Europe, said Hans Krakauer of the International Airline Passengers Association, a consumer group based in London.

Other passenger gripes? Poor service on the ground and in the air, cramped seating and dirty rest rooms.

Delays have been most severe at Milan's Malpensa Airport, where 75 percent of all departures and arrivals were late in the April-June quarter.

Barcelona and Madrid fared almost as badly, while Scandinavian airports had

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the most punctual flights, according to the Brussels, Belgium-based Association of European Airlines.

For Frankfurt to suffer widespread delays shows just how bad the situation has become.

Flughafen Frankfurt/Main AG, the busiest airport in continental Europe, long prided itself on its efficiency. Yet delays here grew from 30 percent of all departures in the first quarter of the year to 36 percent in the second quarter. In July, 48 percent of all departures were delayed.

Aviation officials blame most of the problem on air-traffic bottlenecks elsewhere in Europe.

A charter flight from Frankfurt to Adana, Turkey, was one of several to suffer delays on a recent afternoon. The reason: last week's earthquake in Turkey.

The main obstacle to timely flights in Europe is the region's poorly organized airspace — a patchwork of zones

managed by 65 different air traffic control centers using 35 different monitoring systems.

Aircraft often must adjust their speed, course or altitude each time they enter a new air traffic control zone. Many countries also make passenger planes fly around airspace reserved for their military aircraft.

Lufthansa, which is headquartered in Frankfurt, says its jets have used up \$16 million worth of fuel this year just to make such adjustments.

Airlines and airports blame Europe's disjointed flight control network on politicians intent on jealously guarding sovereignty over national airspace at the expense of Eurocontrol, an agency in Brussels that supervises regional air traffic.

"They created an artificial currency called the euro," said Frankfurt airport spokesman Klaus Busch. "So why can't they do something in the air traffic business?"

# Islamic rebels keep hold in Russia

MAKHACHKALA, Russia (AP) — Islamic rebels held ground in a village in the Caucasus Mountains, despite being hammered by Russian jets and artillery for days, Russian officials said Monday.

The Russians have been targeting the mountaintop village of Tando, which lies along the supply route that has brought fighters and weapons from the breakaway territory of Chechnya. Russian officials even claimed Sunday that they had taken part of Tando.

They backed off that claim Monday, acknowledging that 100 rebels were still in Tando, where they are encircled, according to the Interior Ministry. Up to 1,000 militants were still in the whole of Dagestan, the Defense Ministry said.

The rebels tried to send reinforcements to Tando on Sunday, but they were repulsed in heavy fighting, the Defense Ministry said.

The Russian military claimed it carried out 68 bombing runs and killed 140 rebels Sunday, many in Tando. The claim could not be independently confirmed.

The rebels, who invaded the republic of Dagestan from Chechnya on Aug. 7, still hold five villages, according to the Russians. The militants say they have even more. However, they have not been able to expand their operations beyond the small hamlets they captured in their initial assault.

The militants are fighting for an independent Islamic state in southern Russia but are heavily outgunned by the Russian forces, which are believed to number several thousand.

In Moscow, President Boris Yeltsin held talks on the conflict Monday with Dagestan's leader, Magomedali Magomedov.

After the Kremlin meeting, Magomedov said Dagestan had warned Russian authorities about the possibility of an attack before the Aug. 7 invasion. But Russian forces still appeared unprepared when the assault came, Magomedov was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

He praised the Kremlin's strong response following the rebel incursion. Yeltsin "has given concrete orders ... for the liquidation of the bandits," Magomedov said.

Dagestan's secular politicians and moderate religious leaders, along with much of the population, are opposed to the militants.

Dagestan has been plagued by kidnappings, crime and periodic border clashes, all part of the spillover from the war in Chechnya, where rebels fought a war against Russia in 1994-96. Chechnya has been effectively independent since the end of the war, but Chechen leaders have not been able to bring stability to the lawless territory.

Officials in Dagestan, an impoverished Caucasus Mountains region west of the Caspian Sea, say more than 11,000 civilians have fled the remote, rugged conflict zone.

The Dagestan fighting is the worst in Russia since government troops withdrew from Chechnya nearly three years ago. The Kremlin is pouring soldiers and weaponry into Dagestan but wants to avoid a repeat of the Chechnya debacle, particularly ahead of December parliamentary elections.

Russian officials say up to 700 rebels have been killed in the two-week conflict, though the rebels say that figure is hugely exaggerated. Moscow has acknowledged losing about 40 soldiers.

While support for separatism in Chechnya was widespread, most people in Dagestan oppose the militants, and many Muslim leaders in Russia have also condemned the rebels' violent tactics.



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