

10 YEARS MEDIATION CONTRACT – 10 YEARS DIALOGUE FORUM

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10 years ago, a mediation contract was successfully concluded at Vienna Airport and the Dialogue Forum Airport Vienna was founded. The communication and the balance of interests between citizens, politics and aviation, however, date back to several years before. This article reviews the history of a process, which received attention worldwide.

The mediation process at Vienna Airport originated from the “Master Plan 2015”, which was published by Vienna Airport in April 1998. At the core of the master plan, were the construction of an additional runway and an extension of the terminal to further enable the effective handling of the growing air traffic. Soon after publishing the master plan, citizens expressed their concerns and worries about the expansion of the airport and wanted to be equally involved in future plans. The newly appointed airport chairpersons took citizens’ concerns seriously and wanted to reconcile the airport’s interests with those of the neighbouring communities and the local population. Eventually, a mediation process was initiated. The preparatory work started in the beginning of 2000. After a preparation phase of several weeks, the mediation forum held its first meeting on the 18th January 2001. About 50 contracting parties participated in this meeting – including the mayors of the communities most exposed to aircraft noise, the environmental protection authorities, the representatives from Vienna and Lower Austria, the citizens’ association against aircraft noise, and the aviation sector. The mediation agreement, signed on the 1st March 2001, defined the environmental impacts linked to the expansion plans of the airport and the noise pollution of the current 2-runway-system as core issues. It also set the rules for the cooperation. The mediation agreement further highlighted that addressing the airport expansion plans and the current noise pollution for the population and the local communities was equally important. In doing so, a first step towards mutual trust between all parties was taken.

Partial Contract “Current Measures”

Prior to negotiating the future development of the airport site, measures for the reduction of the existing noise situation had to be stipulated and implemented. Therefore, after numerous meetings of various task forces, the partial contract “Current Measures” was signed on the 27th May 2003. The goal of the agreed measures was to reduce the number of people affected by aircraft noise and to relieve the most affected settlement areas. Above all, measures were implemented to optimally avoid the direct overflight of settlement areas around Vienna Airport. The partial contract regulates the number of take-offs and landings on the individual runway directions within a calendar year, based on target values. Apart from that, also the time frame for the use of the runways was stipulated in the partial contract. Thus, no overflight occurs over individual settlement areas between 9 pm and 7 am, but there are exceptions for ambulance flights



Representatives after signing the partial contract in 2003

as well as any necessary runway closures. Upon the worldwide publication of the new procedures, they became binding for all pilots approaching Vienna Airport. The definite implementation of the measures, taking into account all deadlines, took place at the beginning of the year 2004.

From the Partial Contract to the Mediation Contract

The conclusion of the partial contract was the first landmark in the mediation process at Vienna Airport. From that moment on, the negotiations for the conclusion of a mediation contract that would be binding by civil law were given priority. Discussions focused on the core topics of environmental funds, technical noise control, the position of the 3rd runway and the night flight restrictions. The sustainable development of the entire region was chosen as the benchmark for all suggestions and common decisions. In doing so, every topic was tackled in a way to achieve a balance between economic, environmental and social aspects.

About two years after signing the partial contract, the mediation contract, binding by civil law, was concluded on the 22nd June



Citizens initiatives signing the mediation contract

2005. More than fifty parties signed the summary of the results. The “General Mediation Contract” was concluded between Vienna Airport, Austrian Airlines, the provincial governments of Vienna and Lower Austria, the neighbouring communities as well as citizens’ initiatives against aircraft noise. The mediation contract governs, apart from the process agreements, the night flight regulations, the implementation of the technical noise control and the procedure for the project 3rd runway. Therefore, the project had to be submitted to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). A noise zone limit for a future 3-runway-system is also part of the contract.

This mediation process was a great success in demonstrating that it is possible, even in the context of highly controversial infrastructure projects, to carry out a participatory, transparent and fair procedure involving all direct stakeholders.

From the Mediation Process to the Dialogue Forum

The mediation process convinced neighbouring communities and citizens’ initiatives to continue the discussion and negotiation process. Already during the mediation process, it became clear that Vienna Airport would have to appoint an institution for permanent regional conflict management, known as “The Dialogue Forum”. The “Dialogue Forum” is therefore a direct result of the mediation process. The first meeting of this forum took place on the 27th September 2005. The “Dialogue Forum” attained its full working capacity in the first half year of 2006. The work was taken up by different committees – amongst others by the task force “Environmental Impact Assessment-procedure and mediation contract”, which monitors the adherence of the Airport Vienna to the requirements of the mediation contract, while the task force “evaluation and monitoring” is responsible for the monitoring of the compliance with the general requirements. Due to the extremely dynamic air traffic growth that Vienna Airport, additional measures to those included in the mediation contract have been regularly discussed and negotiated in the “Dialogue Forum” in order to mitigate the environmental impacts of air transport. This process continues today.



Citizens’ initiatives are equally involved and contribute in every negotiation

Constructive Dialogue

Since the establishment of the “Dialogue Forum” at Vienna Airport, a range of measures have been agreed and implemented. Such measures are developed by the air transport sector – Airport Vienna, Austrian Airlines and the Austrian air traffic control Austro Control – and all citizens’ initiatives affected by air traffic, communities and provincial governments, who negotiate on equal footing. Austro Control also decided to engage in the “Dialogue Forum” voluntarily. It regularly contributes to inform possible proposals and to implement agreed measures, after clearing their safety and operational feasibility. The robust decision-making process ensures that the different interests of the parties are brought together in a transparent manner. Dedicated task forces and working groups elaborate solutions for the improvement of quality of living in the region around the airport. These are passed on to the higher levels of approval after unanimous agreement and are eventually evaluated by an extended Board.

10 Years Balance of Interests in the Dialogue Forum

In 2015, the “Dialogue Forum” celebrated its 10th anniversary and its achievements are impressive: about 330 meetings of various committees and 120 regional conferences took place, and a number of measures were successfully implemented. Over the past ten years, the growth of the noise contours has been decoupled from the growth in passenger numbers, despite the use of larger aircraft. Many agreements on air traffic regulations show close to 100% compliance, such as adherence to corridor, turning altitude and single runway operation.



Flughafen Wien Group CEO Mag. Julian Jäger attends meetings of the dialogue forum



The agreed night flight regulations significantly reduce the aircraft noise pollution – many settlement areas are not overflowed between 9 pm and 7 am as a rule. During the night time core period, between 11:30 pm and 5:30 am, an absolute limit of 4.700 take-offs and landings within one calendar year has been realised. Within the current 2-runway system, a comprehensive noise protection programme covers areas which are exposed to a continuous sound level of more than 54 decibel during the day and more than 45 decibel at night. This provision goes beyond the existing legal requirements. The number of people exposed to aircraft noise above 54 decibels during daytime has been reduced by nearly 10% since 2005. This can be correlated to the use of quieter aircraft, which results from the introduction of noise charges.

The numerous changes in approach and departure routes to better avoid populated areas as well as the implementation of transition arrivals and rules for visual approaches were negotiated in the “Dialogue Forum” and successfully implemented. The institutionalised participation and the possibility for the population to actively participate in decision-making through the “Dialogue Forum” are clear successes.



Panel discussion due to the 10th anniversary of dialogue forum

In the past ten years, the “Dialogue Forum” contributed to decoupling aircraft noise exposure from the increase of passenger numbers.

An essential outcome from the “Dialogue Forum” is the possibility to relieve some areas from noise exposure. It means that other areas had to accept increased aircraft noise exposure. This was made possible through the “Dialogue Forum”, as clear rules, such as the preservation of the quality of life and the environment were underlying the noise distribution process.

A Look into the Future

While the final stages of the approval procedure for the 3rd runway are on-going, the “Dialogue Forum” is already considering its future work programme. A concerted approach is needed to elaborate an evaluation system, which would enable to design flight routes with a minimized impact on the population. Also, the environmental impacts of the flight procedures as a whole should be taken into account, including possible environmental interdependencies between noise exposure and air quality. At the same time, the management of the current measures and the monitoring of the adherence to the agreements related to the 2-runway-system must be continued.

A look into the future shows that the work in the “Dialogue Forum” is crucial for the harmonious development of the region. This cooperation and the ability to overcome challenges with all interested parties is key to balance the economic, social and environmental interests.



Panel discussion due to the 10th anniversary of dialogue forum