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By: TA | AP Brief

European airlines under a wave of bomb threats



Officials across Europe reported a fresh slew of bomb threats against multiple flights on Friday, following a string of hoaxes that have caused flight diversions this week.

Three broadcasters also received security threats, in a possible sign the menace was spreading beyond the skies.

No suspicious items have been found and no one has been injured, but the threats have raised concern because they came on the heels of other European disruptions — including attacks on supermarket refrigeration systems and drone incursions.

Overall, the threats have caused minimal disruption to aviation, according to the European air traffic authority.

Eurocontrol said it was aware of bomb threats against 14 flights on Thursday — only 0.05% of all of the nearly 26,300 flights across the European network that day — and seven on Tuesday.

The European Union's transportation commissioner, Apostolos Tzitzikostas, said there were 11 more on Friday.

Even so, airlines have to take every threat seriously because they are ultimately responsible for the lives of their passengers, said Robert Jordan, research director at Britain's Royal United Services Institute think tank.

Jordan told the BBC that there are more ways than ever to make threats against flights, and secure messaging apps have allowed for greater anonymity.

“The risk appetite for airlines is always going to be incredibly low,” he said, noting the great strides that have been made in airport security in recent years. “It is baked into their safety procedures, and it’s baked into their security procedures.”

Tzitzikostas said after a meeting with Eurocontrol and the EU’s Aviation Safety Agency in Brussels that security experts will meet in the Belgian capital next week to discuss measures needed to deal with the bomb threats.

“Our priority here is clear. The safety of passengers and the smooth functioning of European aviation,” he said.

Fighter jets are scrambled

In Hungary, the defense minister said fighter jets escorted three passenger planes Friday through the country’s airspace within an hour after each received a bomb threat.

Romulusz Ruszin-Szendi said the escorts were for flights from Brussels to the Bulgarian capital, Sofia, and from Prague to Cyprus and Romania.

> Eurocontrol said it was working closely with airlines, airports, navigation service providers and other groups across Europe to mitigate any disruption to air traffic flows

French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu’s office said four bomb threats were made against aircraft flying over France.

The planes landed safely at Paris’ Orly Airport and bomb disposal experts conducted inspections. The office didn’t specify which flights were affected.

Threats were also made against a Prague-to-Bucharest, Romania, flight operated by Romanian carrier Tarom, and a Ryanair flight from the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, to Rome.

A WizzAir flight from Prague to Rome was diverted to Venice after a bomb alert, and passengers were evacuated after the aircraft landed.

Eurocontrol said Friday it was monitoring the situation and working closely with airlines, airports, navigation service providers and

other groups across Europe “to mitigate any disruption to air traffic flows.”