EUROPEAN AIRPORTS: EU SUES COMPANIES OVER CHRONIC DELAYS IN BORDER ENTRY/EXIT SYSTEM



The European Union has filed a civil action against IBM, Atos and Leonardo for constant delays in delivering its Entry/Exit System (EES) digital border registry for non-EU travelers. The system has caused long queues and disruptions at European airports.

The case was brought forward in December 2025 at an Estonian court. It comes after internal communications between the consortium and the eu-Lisa agency, which oversees large-scale IT systems for the EU, were analyzed. The agency is based in Tallinn. The case follows years of delays, technical issues and contractual problems since the system was first due to be delivered in 2022.

What Is the EES?

One of the biggest changes to border controls in the Schengen Area, **the Entry/Exit System will eventually replace passport stamps with an electronic record of third country nationals entering and exiting the EU on short term visits.** Travelers will have their biometric data collected upon first registration, including a facial scan and fingerprints. Officials say the system will help increase security at borders, help identify overstayers and improve efficiency.

Rollout Problems at European Airports

The process has been complicated. As the system has been rolled out gradually in 2026, passengers have had to queue for hours at major European airports. There have been issues with the flow of passengers and the performance of the biometric scanners. Fingerprint scanners have not always worked well, particularly if the passenger had sweaty fingers. Some member states are still purchasing the necessary equipment so there has been pressure on airports. This is particularly an issue during busy times and highlights the conflict between increased security and quick processing.

Long-Running Contract Dispute

The legal issues between eu-Lisa and the IBM, Atos and Leonardo consortium have been ongoing for several years. In October 2021 Atos Belgium and IBM Belgium disputed fines that the agency had imposed for missing deadlines. They claimed that some of the delays were due to external factors including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In February 2022 the three companies complained that new deadlines set by eu-Lisa were not realistic and that the project was not being well managed.

Funding issues have also arisen. The contract was increased to €212 million from €142 million in 2021. Further delays have caused additional costs for hardware and software maintenance. This has impacted other IT projects in the EU. In 2023 the agency almost doubled its budget for the EES to €40 million, by taking money away from other projects. In its annual accounts published in July, the agency confirmed that it had taken legal action to safeguard its funding. The Harju County Court in Estonia confirmed that the case had been brought forward. There have been no hearings yet.

Official Position: Dispute Separate from Operations

The European Commission has made it clear that the case is purely about the delays that have occurred during the development. The system is now fully functioning. eu-Lisa have also made it clear that the case has no impact on operations and that the system is now fully functioning in Europe.

The original consortium's contract ended in 2025 and a new group of companies were brought in to implement the system. IBM, Atos and Leonardo continued working on the project until August 2026. None of the three companies would comment on the case.

This demonstrates the challenges in implementing large-scale, high-stakes IT systems for the EU's borders.

Date: 2026-11-16

Article link:
https://www.tourism-review.com/european-airports-still-waiting-for-the-ees-system-news15714