

„NICOLAE TITULESCU” UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF LAW

## PHD THESIS

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State responsibility for damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the  
ground

### *Summary*

Scientific coordinator

Prof.Univ. Dr. Raluca MIGA – BEȘTELIU

Phd Candidate

Sorana Alina Catinca POP

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## II. ASPECTS COVERED BY THE RESEARCH

The issue of the international responsibility of States for damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground was not and it is not considered to be one of the most interesting and exciting areas of study in international law. This belief finds its origins in the tight view of the that modern lawyer that aviation does not produce sufficient cases to be skillfully handled. Moreover, since the first international civil aviation instruments were adopted, there was the belief that aspects of State responsibility are extremely well covered by those instruments at international level and that every State has a well established system of liability, therefore the lawyer is not needed.

Each aeronautical event of a larger or smaller scale can cause damage to third parties on the ground. It is of extreme importance that non-aviation lawyers understand the effects of such an event, the risks implied and that the phenomenon engages multiple legal and social aspects to be dealt with. The magnitude of such events is amplified by the media, driven by the desire to show a careless and indifferent civil aviation system<sup>1</sup> and of the impact that such an event has over State borders as air transport represents a universal activity at this time and a concern for the entire international community.

Compensation for damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground is not only a way of "offering satisfaction" to people dissatisfied of a system and affected by aviation activities, but a way of building and strengthening public confidence in civil aviation. This need, of building the trust in international aviation activities has grown with the emergence of acts of unlawful interference, and reached an apogee on 11 September 2001, when the whole international society was faced with the negative effects of an intentional man-made act of unlawful interference. Unfortunate events faced by civil aviation marked the transition to a new era in which immunity from liability for damage caused by acts of terrorism, with the aim of encouraging the development industry disappeared, to a system in which the consequences of acts of unlawful interference are mainly borne by the operators. The operator in turn is a victim of such acts and the burden put on the operators shoulders is too big for such a small pawn. In a

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<sup>1</sup> G.Leloudas, Risk and Liability in Air Law, Editura Informa, Londra, 2004, pag. 1.

society characterized by the existence of risks, dangers and threats, we can not but observe that liability issues caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground was abandoned by the law-makers, until the catastrophic events which took place in USA on 11 September 2001.

The attacks triggered political, economic, social and legislative reactions, under the aegis of the International Civil Aviation Organization, which concluded that one of the factors that contributed to the amplification of the effects of the event was the outdated legal framework and lack of management of hazards, effective risk analysis and an international uniform system with regard to compensation for damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground. One of the questions raised by the events was - who should bear the costs of terrorism? From that moment on, various controversies were born, reflected in the discussion conducted within the Diplomatic Conferences organized for the adoption of new instruments in the aviation security and liability to third parties field.

The thesis examines existing international mechanisms for compensation of damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground as a result of an act of unlawful interference and the obligation of States to prevent such acts to happen and protect those on the ground. The paper also examines aspects related to risk perception, State liability for risk in an international society driven by continuous and rapid evolution, both in terms of technology and social relations. In an era where public confidence in the aviation industry and the State has been dramatically shaken, identification of mechanisms for compensating victims of terrorist attacks must be based on cooperation and risk sharing.

### **III. THE METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORITICAL APPROACH OF THE RESEARCH**

The research for this paper has integrated combined methods of analysis, based on views expressed in the doctrine and elements of theoretical and critical analysis, reformist at times. The thesis presents an analytical perspective of currently existing theories related to State responsibility for breach of a due diligence obligation, to the concept of responsibility for risk and the systems used by international society to compensate third parties on the ground for damage caused by aircraft, especially because of acts of unlawful interference. The thesis also

presents a in a compared manner, to other areas where State responsibility is incident for violation of a due diligence obligation and the general practice of States with regard to compensating victims on the ground.

The paper analyzes the issues under discussion from two perspectives - of aviation security and the new rules in the field of liability for third parties on the ground existing at the international, regional and national level. As regards aviation security issues, it highlights the existence of a duty of care, a real erga omnes obligation of States to implement specific measures for prevention of acts of unlawful interference and to properly supervise their implementation by relevant stakeholders, such as airports and operators. In terms of the new regulations on liability for damage caused to third parties on the ground, the thesis shows the weaknesses of the existing and proposed systems, showing and demonstrating that terrorism is aimed at States and the latter has an obligation to protect persons on the ground, a general obligation towards humanity, primarily protecting the right to life. The paper also proposes a three-tiered approach to liability in the field, the last being the State level, which ultimately, in the absence of a contribution to the production of damage, has a moral obligation to protect third parties on the ground, while protecting the operator as well.

The research involved an extensivestudy of doctrine and jurisprudence taking into account:

- a) The issue of resposnibility for risk and the social perception of risk;
- b) Elements relating to the definitions of aviation safety and security;
- c) The regulation of aviation security both internationally and regionally;
- d) The doctrine of due diligence and modus operandi of such an obligation, presentation of theoretical and practical point of view;
- e) Issues related to the protection of humn rights;
- f) The evolution of liability scheme for damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground, minutes of meetings, working documents and legislation;
- g) International and national jurisprudence.

#### **IV. SCIENTIFIC NOVELTY OF THE PAPER**

The analysis of the liability regime for damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground in terms of State responsibility for violation of its due diligence obligations is in itself a new idea. Through deep analysis of the evolution of concepts of international responsibility, obligation of due diligence of States and existing compensation mechanisms for third parties on the ground, the thesis is an innovative approach of responsibility in the Romanian doctrinal context.

The main results of the research are:

- a) profound analysis of the concept of international responsibility of States for risk and doctrine of due diligence in the context of liability for damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground;
- b) selection, structuring and analysis of a large case-law, of the International Court of Justice, the International Arbitration and national courts;
- c) Emphasis of the role the State has in terms of maintaining a safe and secure civil aviation system and duty to protect this sector;
- d) A detailed analysis of the regulations in relation to claims of third party on the ground for damage caused by aircraft due to acts of unlawful interference and highlighting major shortcomings of the current compensation mechanism;
- e) Proposal of solutions for future modernization process of the existing regulatory framework.

#### **V. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE PAPER**

Often perceived as technical elements, aviation safety and security are however genuine political and legal dimensions<sup>2</sup>. From the political point of view, maintaining a safe and secure aviation system requires a risk management conducted at a high-level, which is the State, based on a risk analysis and a complete picture of the implications of such a system has from a social, economic and technological point of view. From a legal perspective, once identified, this system

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<sup>2</sup> J. Huang, *Aviation Safety through the Rule of Law – ICAO’s Mechanisms and Practices*, Editura Wolters Kluwer, 2009, pag. 229



must translate into rules so that actors involved in aviation activities comply with it, not only at national level, but also at an international one. Consequently, the establishment, maintenance and development of air transport activity in optimum conditions of safety and security should be assumed by States as well as compliance with their international obligations. States have a duty to promote aviation safety and security, and also have an obligation to abstain from any action that could endanger civil aviation.

The thesis proposes a pragmatic and fair approach to the issue of liability towards third parties, indicating that civil aviation must foresee and prevent both general risks, as shown by an aircraft-engineering failures, weather phenomena, human error, but also the risks man produces intentionally and that may endanger the safety and security of the aviation industry. The most serious of intentional human actions that endanger civil aviation is terrorism, as we have seen with the events that have shocked the world on 11 September 2001. In such times, the international community can show the value of his efforts, involvement in finding solutions, openness to communication and cooperation, and not least, the power of prediction and risk adjustment.

It becomes important at this moment in international society that risk management be achieved through legal instruments concerning liability for damage to third parties on the ground and contributing to building trust and not generating an imbalance between the operator and the third party on the ground by putting more burden on the shoulders of the air operator. A scheme granting for compensation must be developed leaving no room for interpretation and avoiding claims before national or international courts. "It is time for legislators to overcome their own heuristic stratagems and become innovators."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Leloudas pag. 213.

## VI. THESIS SUMMARY

The thesis debuts with the analysis of the concepts of aviation safety and security, Chapter II presenting the State's obligations in this regard. The general obligation of the State to protect and prevent has a tripartite nature - to refrain from committing unlawful acts, to prevent them and to punish those who are guilty of committing such acts – all of these being *erga omnes* obligations. All three elements of the obligation to protect and prevent is a manifestation of the conscience of humanity, by the right to life, a fundamental human right.<sup>4</sup> Primary feature of this "trio", in terms of obligations *erga omnes*, is their "universal and unreciprocal character"<sup>5</sup>. These obligations are "not rooted in an exchange of rights and obligations, but in the adherence to a normative system."<sup>6</sup> Thus, "any form of noncompliance by a State may not justify infringement of the rule".<sup>7</sup>

In essence, the *erga omnes* obligations contain both negative and positive obligations. From this perspective, States must not only take the necessary steps to develop and maintain safety and security in civil aviation, or to refrain from putting it at danger but are required to promote safety and security. These concepts contribute to the development of a uniform system of protection. It is imperative for States to identify and implement a compensation mechanism for third parties on the ground which is effective and discreet, ensuring both the interests of third parties and of air operators. This is possible by detecting deficiencies in the aviation security system and taking proper actions to correct them. It is a challenge that requires determination of the international community. In this context, we consider that the submissions of His Excellency, the Minister of Justice of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, dr. Karl Polak are conclusive: "Safety, security and optimal deployment of business aviation is the concern of the States and peoples of the world. All States, however different as their interests may be, share the same interest in the conservation and promotion of international air transport. Modern society can not

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<sup>4</sup> Huang pag. 231.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>6</sup> R.Provost, „Reciprocity in Human Rights and Humanitarian Law”, BYIL nr. 65, 1994, pag. 386.

<sup>7</sup> G. Fitzmaurice, „The General Principles of International Law”, RdC nr. II, 1957, pag. 1120.

function without it."<sup>8</sup> Chapter II also brings into focus the concept of soft law, illustrating the importance of this category in the regulatory system of the International Civil Aviation Organization, especially in the field of aviation security.

Chapter III presents the history of the concept of international responsibility of States, a concept so beautiful and complex, with a glorious past, which generates in the reader's consciousness the comprehension of this phenomenon and the need for the attribution to the State. It also presents the essence of State responsibility for acts of individuals, preparing in this way the development of the issue of liability of States for damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground as a result of acts of unlawful interference. The chapter continues with aspects of risk perception, the influence of social media with regards to risk perception, underlining the State's obligations in a risk based society.

Chapter IV addresses issues that describe the due diligence obligation of the State in terms of preventing acts of unlawful interference, as well as the protection of persons on the ground, showing the *modus operandi* of this obligation in general and in the air transport field.

All these issues addressed, prepare the scene for the analysis on state obligations to protect third parties on the ground, the existing compensation systems and mechanisms at this time in civil aviation, with a focus on the need to update it and adapt it to the new social and technological context, as detailed in Chapters V and VI. The paper also examines the issue of accountability, with the precedence of its assignment in a context of confusion and evasion. This confusion comes from the close connection between the word "responsibility" and State, the intentions of the promoters of the conventions on compensation for damages to third parties on the ground to divert attention from the responsibility of the State, by naming the recent instruments adopted in 2009 in Montreal - Conventions on compensation for damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground.

Air transport is a huge industry with a significant impact in the international community from an economic, social and political point of view. The growing demand for this service involves the development of a complex and solid international infrastructure and uniform legal framework. Apparently a sector based on relationships established between the operator and passenger, air transport requires increased attention of the States due to its international

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<sup>8</sup> ICAO Doc. 8979-LC/165-1, International Conference on Air Law, Haga, decembrie 1970.

character. The complexity of the existing relations in the aviation industry and the risks that this activity presents to passengers, operators and third parties on the ground imposes an obligation of conduct for States, whose violation leads invariably to their liability.

In order to achieve a protective cocun for the international society, States must understand that only in unity common objectives can achieved and only by working together in full cooperation, "air can be used for the benefit of humanity, to serve humanity ..."<sup>9</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH

In terms of international instruments on liability for damages caused by aircraft to third parties on the ground as a result of acts of unlawful interference, we appreciate that the International Civil Aviation Organization work is not completed as the new instruments, modernizing the 1952 Rome Convention, do not achieve their purpose. A review of these provisions would be appropriate, and we consider that a better source of inspiration is the Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects of 1972, instead of the International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution.

Efforts made by ICAO to update the Rome Convention are commendable, but unfortunately not enough. The Diplomatic Conference held in Montreal in 2009, although apparently a success due to the adoption of two new international instruments, in reality represents a failure, a "dead end"<sup>10</sup>. This believe is due to the decision of submmiting a draft Convention, which requires such complex elements, without it reaching the necessary maturity of a comprehensive and appropriate legal framework.

This raises the question whether such a failure can be repaired. If the 1999 Montreal Convention for the Unification of Certain Rules for International Carriage by Air was in its time

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<sup>9</sup> Presentation of the President of the ICAO Council, Dr. Asad Kotaite, the regarding Council's work in the years 1998,1999 and 2000, and supplementary report on the activity of the Council of ICAO in the first six months of 2001, presented at the 33th General Assembly of ICAO.

<sup>10</sup> M. Jenninson, „Rescuing the Rome Convention of 1952: Six Decades of Effort to Make a Workable Regime for Damage Cuased by Foreing Aircraft to Third Parties”, Uniform Law Review, , pag .812.

a sign of the evolution of air law, efforts to update the Rome Convention of 1952 are merely a signal of a major escape of responsibility and need to be reformed urgently. Enough time has elapsed since the unfortunate events of 11 September 2001 and the time has come for those effects to be properly analyzed and integrated into civil aviation, both in terms of risk analysis, and not in relation to past experiences, but to the unforeseen. As Vijay Poonoosamy was saying, rapporteur for the update of the 1929 Warsaw Convention, the predecessor of the 1999 Montreal Convention: „all should demonstrate a spirit and a desire for dialogue, ingenuity and compromise (especially regarding fundamental issues underlying value system as well as damages and attribution of responsibility) in order to expeditiously, fairly, correctly and uniformly implement legislation in order that justice is done to the consumer and operator, both today and tomorrow ”.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Chicago Convention, each State has the obligation to ensure a safe and secure civil aviation climate in its territory. Thus, the State has the duty to supervise air operators on compliance with SARPs and other international, unless that obligation is delegated to another State.<sup>12</sup>“When it comes to standards of aviation safety and security, wbut citizens of other States are affected as well due to the international character of civil aviation.. Any other state that allows entry into its territory of aircraft registered in a State that violates its international obligations has every reason to be worried and concerned about compliance with those standards by the state of origin and the crew.”<sup>13</sup> For these reasons we consider that States have an obligation and a responsibility for failure to comply with international standards, both at an individual and a collective level.

It is time that States understand that new challenges can not be approached unless their national pride and personal waivedis changed. The vision with regard to such a phenomena must be both objective and subjective<sup>14</sup> in order to achieve the desired goals of protecting individuals

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<sup>11</sup> V. Poonoosamy, Report of the Rapporteur on the Modernization and Consolidation of the Warsaw System, LC/30-WP/4, Appendix A, at A-5, citat din Raportului celei de-a 57a Confință a Asociației de Drept Internațional în Madrid.

<sup>12</sup> Huang pag. 229.

<sup>13</sup> A. Kotaite, „Sovereignty under Great Pressure to Accomodate the Growing Need for Global cooperation, ICAO Journal nr. 50, 1995, pag. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Leloudas pag. 211.

on the ground and other actors in the civil aviation arena. However, in an international environment characterized by instability, with media having a significant influence on society's perception about risk, generating confusion, distrust and rebellion, nothing hinders the process of negotiating an international instrument in the benefit of all stakeholders: State, industry, people on the ground, lawyers and experts.<sup>15</sup> Confidence in the authority is shaken, and the only way of increasing trust is to adopt international instruments and not to protect the personal interests of the parties, but their common interests, because only in such a context, the parties can grow and can develop.

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<sup>15</sup> D.Lupton, Risk, Londra, 2009, pag. 29.

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4. Convenția pentru reprimarea actelor ilicite împotriva siguranței aviației civile semnată la Montreal la 23 septembrie 1971
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