

Belarusian State Academy of Aviation
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English Language Department

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Belousov Andrey

Scientific supervisor:

Anna Matskevich

Senior Teacher of English

Language Department, EdM

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Content

Introduction.....	3
> The results of production activities under the influence of the global pandemic	5
∩ Summary of recommendations	8
∩ Conclusion	10
References.....	12

Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had a devastating impact on the aviation industry globally as nearly all air travel came to a halt or was severely reduced in late March and April 2020. The Republic of Belarus was no exception, since middle of March, airlines began to massively cancel scheduled flights. There was a break in the performance of international flights by foreign airlines, and a significant number of flights of the base carrier - OJSC «Belavia Airline»-were canceled.

Minsk National Airport, as well as the national airline, did not stop working for a single day, continuing to serve the remaining scheduled flights, as well as charter and repatriation flights to deliver citizens who remained abroad. The national air carrier Belavia at this time focused on transit traffic, continued to carry out the flight program to the permitted countries throughout the entire time since the beginning of the development of the pandemic, gradually restoring the route network. In addition, the airport received and sent cargo flights, including servicing aircraft with medical humanitarian aid. But all of this traffic was very limited compared to the usual volume of air travel.

To understand the situation, you can refer to the statistics taken from an interview with the General Director of the national air carrier Belavia. As of March 7, 2021, the airline operates seven flights a week to Russia (five to Moscow and one flight a week to St. Petersburg and Rostov-on-Don). As of April 15, 2021, the national airline operates 9 flights a week to Russia. Before the pandemic, the volume reached 150 flights per week. These are so different indicators. But this indicates a gradual return to earlier indicators. Foreign airlines are gradually restoring their regular flight program to Minsk National Airport after a forced pause due to the coronavirus pandemic. By August 2020, six foreign airlines resumed regular flights to the capital's airport - Iraqi Airlines, Turkish Airlines, Uzbek Airlines, German airline Lufthansa, airline from the United Arab Emirates - Etihad Airlines and Polish national airline - LOT. AIR China has not stopped operating flights to Minsk. However, international passenger traffic is now only a small fraction of what it was before the pandemic. [1] .

Because of the pandemic, dozens of airlines around the world went bankrupt. In the United States alone, 9 companies went bankrupt in 2020: Compass Airlines, Expressjet, Miami Air International, Nantucket Express, Ravn Alaska, Shoreline Aviation, Virgin Atlantic. Another important factor that softened the process of going into bankruptcy for many organizations was the measures of state support. In the most developed countries of the EU and the UK, significant sums were allocated

from the budget to save carriers. For example, the German airline Lufthansa received about €9 billion from the German government [4].

At the same time, OJSC "Belavia Airline", as general director said, airline did not receive a penny of assistance money, but at the same time, as before, the company operates according to the established operating mode to the extent that it can ensure a high level of aviation safety and flight safety, as well as uninterrupted maintenance of the existing flight frequency, passenger traffic and other related activities. In turn, the airport fulfills its obligations, maintains the infrastructure of the enterprise in working order and does not allow the technological shutdown of the production process.

However, do not underestimate the contribution of the state, it supported the airline in other ways: it negotiated with the governments of other countries and aviation authorities to launch flights. [2]

As for the immediate plans, the main task facing the company is to restore the indicators to the level of 2019. It is also planned to enter new markets, so a new destination to Dubai was opened, to create better connecting conditions at the Minsk National Airport for transferring passengers from flight to flight. Due to this, the number of transit passengers and destinations will grow.

This work assesses the impact of COVID-19 on aviation and tourism in the Republic of Belarus and provides some recommendations on how to potentially mitigate this impact and achieve a recovery rate that is higher than the global average. The year 2020 was extremely challenging for aviation and tourism. The year 2021 will also be very difficult. However, there are opportunities to use this crisis to improve the long-term situation of the Republic of Belarus. This crisis provides an opportunity to "reset" the country's aviation industry through reforms, new strategies and restructuring. This work briefly discusses some of these possibilities and provides some recommendations.

However, do not underestimate the contribution of the state, it supported the airline in other ways: it negotiated with the governments of other countries and aviation authorities to launch new flights.

The results of production activities under the influence of the global pandemic

In the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, starting from March 2020, Minsk National Airport has been experiencing an indefinite suspension of international flights by foreign airlines, as well as the cancellation of most flights of the base carrier, OJSC Belavia Airlines.

"Indeed, 2020 was not an easy year. If at the end of 2019, the Minsk airport for the first time crossed the mark of 5 million passengers served, and thus entered a new category for passenger traffic, then according to the final data of 2020, a completely different picture is observed. In total, almost 2 million passengers-this is the passenger traffic for this year, which brought us back to the volume of 2012-In this period our airport served a little more than 1 million 820 thousand people. At the beginning of 2020, we saw a fairly dynamic growth in the number of passengers and flights served – about 20% and 7%, respectively. However, then what happened happened. And we had to face completely different conditions and figures, look for ways out of the current financial situation, ensuring the operation of the enterprise according to the established operating mode to the extent that allows us to ensure a high level of aviation safety and flight safety, as well as uninterrupted maintenance of the current frequency of flights, passenger traffic and other related activities, the fulfillment of the obligations assumed by the airport, maintaining the infrastructure of the enterprise in working order and preventing technological shutdown of the production process. A lot of resources were also used to ensure anti-epidemic measures at the airport, " said Vyacheslav Khoroneko, General Director of RUE "National Airport Minsk".

In 2020, due to the unstable epidemiological situation, there was a decline in passenger traffic and a reduction in the number of flights performed. In general, in 2020, Minsk National Airport served 1,939,192 passengers. Compared to the previous year, passenger traffic fell by 62%. On arrival, the Airport received 1,008,554 passengers (minus 60.4% by 2019). Departing flights were used by 930,638 people (minus 63.6% by 2019). The number of sorties in 2020 decreased by 53.2% compared to 2019 and amounted to 13,292.

In April, 22,196 passengers were served, there was a decline of 93.7% (minus 329,388 passengers) compared to the same indicator in April 2019. Only 15.7% of the scheduled flights were completed. The number of flights amounted to 357, which is 83.1% less (minus 1752 flights) than the results of the work for the same period last year. At the same time, two record lows were recorded: the lowest number of passengers fell on April 21, 2020-162 people (on the same day in 2019, 12,449

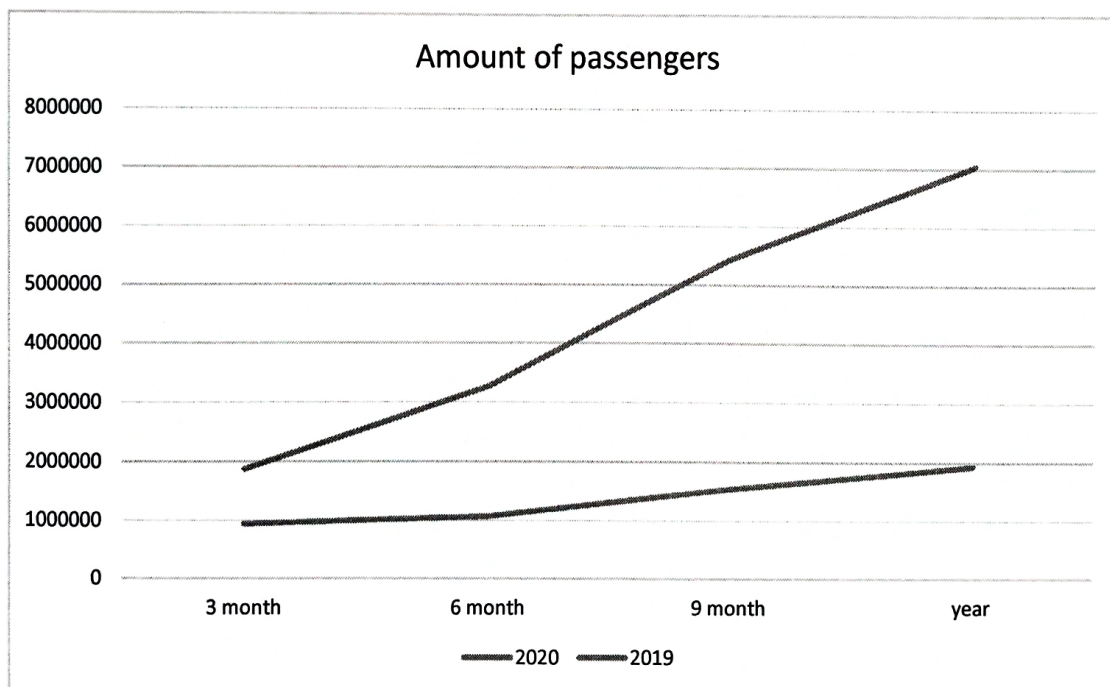
people were served). The lowest number of flights served per day at the airport was recorded on April 16, 2020 - only 4 flights.

In just 4 months of 2020, the airline served 960,897 passengers (minus 25.4% compared to last year) and 6,221 flights (minus 24.6% compared to last year).

From month to month, there was a progressive increase in indicators. So, in May, almost 38 thousand passengers were served (72% more than in the previous month), in June – already 74 thousand, and the number of flights was 579, in July the figure exceeded 146 thousand, the number of flights was 1008. In August 2020, the airline served 8 times more passengers than in April 2020 - more than 176 thousand, and 3 times more, compared to April 2020, passenger flights - 1136. In August, the airport handled an average of 65-75 passenger flights per day. In April 2020, this figure did not exceed 38 flights.

In December 2020, the airport served 113,572 passengers, which is 71.1% less than in December of the previous year, when 392,858 passengers were served. The number of flights in December 2020 was 918, which is 59.3% less than in the same period of 2019 (2,253).

According to the results of the work during the New Year holidays from December 25, 2020 to January 10, 2021, 58,314 passengers used the Minsk airport. The number of flights - 470. The busiest day at the airport was December 30. On this day, the airport served 5060 passengers.



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The frequency of flights has increased, among other things, due to the opening of charter programs to Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, Albania, Montenegro and Bulgaria, which are also operated by Belavia. [3]

Summary of recommendations

1) The Republic of Belarus needs to develop the regional transport segment in order to contribute to the recovery of the aviation and tourism sectors during a period of significantly lower international traffic. There is also an opportunity to promote regional tourism as an alternative to travel outside the region, which may remain restrictive or difficult until vaccination is carried out. Although the development of the regional transportation segment based on, for example, Grodno Airlines will require a radical change in its fleet and business model, attracting financial resources, and solving personnel issues, this will bear fruit in the future. All this is a long and complex process, but it is important to start carrying out this work today, so as not to lose time and not to miss the available opportunities.

2) The Republic of Belarus should improve air connectivity between it and partner countries during the pandemic and after this crisis. Promoting tourism between Belarus and partner countries will also help to encourage greater connectivity. Tourist routes can potentially be quickly resumed and even expanded if tourist flows increase.

3) The Republic of Belarus needs to invest in expanding the potential of air cargo transportation, using its strategic location and increasing revenue from cargo transportation for the aviation industry at a time of declining passenger traffic. Cargo transportation is an important source of revenue for airlines and airports in the Republic of Belarus. The dramatic decline in passenger traffic during the pandemic has further increased the importance of cargo and has led some airlines to increase their capacity to carry cargo. This represents an opportunity for the aviation industry to continue investing in cargo capacity, providing the foundation for long-term growth. Prior to the emergence of COVID-19, most of the aviation cargo was transported in the cargo compartments of passenger aircraft. The sharp reduction in passenger flights has led to a significant reduction in the total cargo capacity globally, as well as in the Republic of Belarus. Thus, the total volume of air cargo transportation in 2020 will decrease. IATA has reported double-digit reductions in cargo tonne-kilometers every month since March. However, this year there has been a much smaller decline in freight traffic than the decline in passenger numbers due to a significant increase in cargo flights. Higher volumes of air cargo carried also helped boost revenue from cargo transportation.

4) The Republic of Belarus should promote contactless air transportation and invest in technologies to support digital procedures at airports. COVID-19 has led to significant changes in the air travel experience to minimize the risk of the virus spreading. Airlines and airports around the world are now accelerating the adoption

of new technologies to support contactless air travel. Although digitalization was already a major global trend in the aviation industry before the pandemic, the RB region generally lagged behind in terms of the introduction of new digital technologies and procedures. This crisis provides Belarus with an opportunity to catch up with other regions in terms of digitalization, and also meets new expectations for contactless air travel.

5) The Republic of Belarus needs to implement common standards and rules for air transportation in the COVID-19 environment.

6) The Government of the country should consider providing financial support to airlines through the provision of loans and loan guarantees.

7) The Government should consider providing general support packages to the aviation and tourism industries through benefits such as wage subsidies, tax cuts, and fee exemptions.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has led to significant changes in the air travel experience to minimize the risk of the virus spreading. Airlines and airports around the world are now accelerating the adoption of new technologies to support contactless air travel. Although digitalization was already a major global trend in the aviation industry before the pandemic, Belarus generally lagged behind in terms of the introduction of new digital technologies and procedures. This crisis provides Belarus with an opportunity to catch up with other regions in terms of digitalization, and also meets new expectations for contactless air travel. Airports in the Republic of Belarus rely mainly on non-automated check-in and boarding processes. Significant investment will be required to support new digital and contactless procedures.

Capacity constraints must also be carefully managed to meet the requirements of social distancing, especially in airport terminals that primarily serve domestic traffic, as domestic traffic will recover much faster than international traffic. It will also require investment from the airlines of the Republic of Belarus to facilitate the introduction of online or mobile check-in and document verification. Using new technologies, passengers can walk past the check-in desk and leave their luggage on the baggage belt without having to interact with staff. There is also the possibility of introducing contactless verification by security and immigration services when making the right investments by airports and governments. This crisis also opens up a potential opportunity for the countries of the Republic of Belarus to accelerate projects to expand airport capacity. Several airports in the Republic of Belarus were overloaded and operated well above design capacity before the pandemic. It is now possible to continue construction, using safe distancing measures to protect workers and minimize disruption to existing operations, given the lower-than-normal level of passenger traffic.

Airport construction projects will help boost the Belarusian economy and create new jobs during this difficult period. Belarus also needs to consider adopting uniform regulations and standards for air travel during a pandemic. Globally, there is no harmonization – a problem that the aviation industry is trying to solve with new guidelines and recommendations aimed at reducing the risk of transmission of the virus during travel. ³² The Impact Of COVID-19 On Aviation And Tourism In The Republic Of Belarus. Belarus should consider adopting new guidelines and recommendations from the International Civil Aviation Organization. By complying with the new global standards, the RB will facilitate the resumption of international travel and eliminate differences in the positions of countries that currently create difficulties and confusion for airlines and passengers. The RB should also consider

adopting IATA recommendations, including deploying COVID-19 testing as an alternative to quarantine measures. COVID testing at airports is becoming increasingly common around the world, and it is important that countries and airports in the Republic of Belarus also implement testing programs. For several months, the global aviation industry has been trying to support the resumption of air travel through a number of initiatives that facilitate air travel but require uniform adoption by Governments.

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