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Air cargo arrival: from aircraft to customs declaration

What is arriving air cargo counted against at the terminal, who lodges the summary declaration, and how does the importer's declaration relate to that record?

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Online interactive version: **https://ozgurkonakci.com/en/guide/air-cargo-arrival-manifest-customs/**

SHORT ANSWER

On arrival by air, the summary declaration is lodged by the carrier or its representative: according to Türkiye's Ministry of Trade it is lodged electronically at the customs office of entry, and when the aircraft arrives the carrier sends the customs office an electronic arrival notification. The customs declaration itself is lodged by the importer or a customs broker on their behalf; its steps, deadlines and temporary storage are covered in Customs clearance step by step. Between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal, our work on the arrival side was this: counting the cargo arriving from passenger and cargo aircraft and inspecting it for damage, checking it against the manifest and recording it in the system, lodging the summary declaration in BİLGE, and handing the cargo over to the customs officers.

A short note first

This page gives a general account of the steps air cargo goes through at the destination airport, from the aircraft to the customs declaration; it does not name airlines. Sentences marked “between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal” or “the practice at the time” describe the author's experience in those years, not today's rules. Today's rules are given separately from official Turkish sources and IATA. Summary declaration deadlines, the steps of the customs declaration and the temporary storage period are not repeated here; links to the relevant topics are given instead. Sources are listed at the end of the page.

From aircraft to customs declaration: the steps

The AWB, chargeable weight and a summary of the summary declaration deadlines are covered in **Air cargo: the AWB and chargeable weight**, and the export side in **Air cargo export: from acceptance to aircraft loading**. This page follows cargo at the destination airport from the aircraft to the customs declaration.

Between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal, our work on the arrival side took place both on the apron and in the office, in these steps:

1. **Counting and damage inspection:** The cargo arriving from passenger and cargo aircraft at the airline's cargo department was counted and inspected for damage.
2. **Checking against the manifest:** In the office, the cargo arriving on or leaving with the aircraft was checked against the manifest and recorded in the system.
3. **Summary declaration:** The declaration the airline had to make to the customs officers as the carrier was made by lodging a summary declaration with the BİLGE program.
4. **Customs declaration:** Importers, or customs brokers acting for them, opened their declarations on the basis of the information I had entered in the system.
5. **Handover to customs:** The cargo was handed over to the customs officers; we filled in the necessary paperwork and had the officers sign it.

This list describes the practice at the time. Below, today's rule for each step is given separately with its sources.

From the aircraft to the cargo terminal

In the practice at the time, cargo reached the airline's cargo department from both passenger aircraft and cargo aircraft; there the cargo was counted and inspected for damage.

Breaking down cargo that arrives on pallets and containers (ULDs) falls within the handling section of IATA's **ULD Regulations** (ULDR). That section covers ULD storage, transport and movement, transfer, build-up and break-down. ULD types are covered in the ULDs: unit load devices section. This page does not give today's details of unloading the aircraft.

Counting against the flight manifest

In the practice at the time, the cargo was counted and inspected for damage on the apron; in the office it was checked against the aircraft's cargo list, the **flight manifest**, and recorded in the system.

Today the manifest data also arrives as an electronic message. According to the e-AWB standard operating procedure IATA published for Mauritius Airport, the carrier sends the ground handling agent the flight manifest message (FFM or XFFM) received from the origin station. The **FFM** is the airline flight manifest message of the Cargo-IMP standard. That procedure is for that airport; for the flow at your airport, ask the airline or the ground handling agent.

Cargo-IMP is no longer being developed. IATA stopped maintaining Cargo-IMP messages on 1 January 2015; the 34th edition of the Cargo-IMP Manual is the final one. Cargo-IMP can still be used, but new development happens only in the **Cargo-XML** standard.

What happens when the count does not match the manifest, or the cargo arrives damaged, is covered in **Missing, surplus and damaged air cargo**. In the practice at the time, when cargo was missing, messages were sent to the departure and transfer airports and followed up.

The carrier's summary declaration and arrival notification

Between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal, my office work was of two kinds. One was internal to the airline: checking the cargo arriving on or leaving with the aircraft against the manifest and recording it in the system. The other was the declaration the airline had to make to the customs officers as the carrier. At the time we did this by lodging a summary declaration with the **BİLGE** program. BİLGE was new in those years; I was one of its first users.

According to Türkiye's 2006 presentation at the EU screening meeting, BİLGE was introduced as a pilot application at Atatürk Airport in late 1998–1999. How BİLGE is used today is covered in the BİLGE: where declarations are processed section.

The carrier still lodges the summary declaration today. According to Türkiye's Ministry of Trade, it is lodged by the person who brings the goods into the customs territory of Türkiye or assumes responsibility for their carriage, that is, the carrier, or its representative. It is lodged at the customs office of entry by electronic data processing, that is, electronically.

When the aircraft arrives at the customs office, the carrier sends the customs office an electronic **arrival notification** without delay.

The deadline for the summary declaration in air transport is given in the Customs at the airport: the summary declaration section and is not repeated here.

The customs declaration: importer and customs broker

The summary declaration is the carrier's declaration; the **customs declaration**, which tells customs which procedure the goods are to be placed under, is lodged by the importer or a customs broker on their behalf. In the practice at the time, importers, or customs brokers acting for them, opened their declarations on the basis of the information I had entered in the system.

The number of packages and the description of the goods on the AWB must match those in the summary declaration. This page does not say what happens when they do not. How the summary declaration relates to the customs declaration is explained in the Before you start: registration, permits and the summary declaration section, and amendment and cancellation in When something is wrong: amendment, cancellation and post-clearance control.

Handover to customs and temporary storage

In the practice at the time, the cargo was handed over to the customs officers, and we filled in the necessary paperwork and had the officers sign it. Sometimes the goods were counted first and then handed over to customs.

Goods presented to customs wait at an approved temporary storage facility until they are placed under a customs procedure. The temporary storage period, and what happens when it runs out, are covered in the Uncleared goods: temporary storage limits, disposal and abandonment section and are not repeated here.

Test yourself

1. Who lodges the summary declaration in air transport, and how does it reach customs? *(Answer: The carrier that brings the goods in or assumes responsibility for their carriage, or its representative; electronically, at the customs office of entry.)*
2. What does the carrier send customs when the aircraft arrives at the customs office? *(Answer: An electronic arrival notification.)*
3. Which standard is the FFM a message of, and when did IATA stop maintaining that standard? *(Answer: It is the airline flight manifest message of Cargo-IMP; IATA stopped maintaining Cargo-IMP on 1 January 2015, and new development happens in Cargo-XML.)*

Frequently asked questions

Who lodges the summary declaration for air cargo?

According to Türkiye's Ministry of Trade, the summary declaration is lodged by the person who brings the goods into the customs territory of Türkiye or assumes responsibility for their carriage, that is, the carrier, or its representative. It is lodged at the customs office of entry by electronic data processing, that is, electronically.

What is the arrival notification?

It is the notification the carrier sends the customs office electronically, without delay, when the means of transport arrives there. The Ministry of Trade's summary declaration FAQ page lists it as an obligation of the carrier.

What is the FFM, and is it still used?

The FFM is the airline flight manifest message of the Cargo-IMP standard. IATA stopped maintaining Cargo-IMP messages on 1 January 2015; Cargo-IMP can still be used, but new development happens only in the Cargo-XML standard.

When was BİLGE introduced?

According to Türkiye's 2006 presentation at the EU screening meeting, BİLGE was introduced as a pilot application at Atatürk Airport in late 1998–1999. The source gives this as a range, so we do not give a single year.

SOURCES

Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Trade — Frequently asked questions: Summary declaration (in Turkish) — https://ticaret.gov.tr/gumruk-islemleri/sikca-sorulan-sorular/ticari/ozet-beyan
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