

# General aviation: where stupid decisions create uncertainty

By Arie Egozi on 3 April, 2014

If you need further proof that governments operate in a sort of vacuum, with no connection to reality – here is another. If nothing changes in the coming month, general aviation in Israel will be grounded, and with it some flying schools and maintenance shops.

Stupidity, it seems, has no limits. The process of closing the airport in Herzelia near Tel Aviv has begun and, if the Supreme Court does not stop the process, 200 general aviation aircraft will be grounded and a number of maintenance shops shut.

As I have written here before, this weird situation was created by the hunger for real estate in central Israel and the impotence of the ministry of transportation.

The process has been long and twisted, but its end could actually be the end of general aviation in Israel.

Two decisions were made – to close Sde Dov, the Tel Aviv city airport, and Herzelia airport, some 10 miles to the northeast.

Sde Dov serves the Israeli airforce (IAF) for small aircraft and helicopters, as well as the flights of two airlines, Arkia and Israir, to Eilat, the Red Sea resort. After the airport closes these flights will depart from Ben Gurion airport.

Sde Dov is located on one of Israel's most lucrative real estate locations, in the centre of the country. The pressure to use it for building apartment houses has been on for years.

When Herzelia – where most of the general aviation is located – closes, some of the grounds will also be used for new buildings. Herzelia is also the centre of all maintenance operations for general aviation.

The government decision to shut down Herzelia airport was not made without alternatives. The first was abandoned because it would have interfered with one of the IAF's Arrow ballistic missile interceptor batteries.

And now the ministry of transportation has come up with another alternative – the small strip in Megido in Northern Israel. The distance from central Israel may have been a pill that the general aviation people could swallow, but they will not need to. Why? Because Megido airport is only 6km from the Israeli air force's Ramat David airbase. With something like 80 general aviation takeoffs and landings an hour, this would be a nightmare in such a proximity to a very busy airforce base.

At this stage there are still options to stop the evacuation process of the Herzelia airport: to propose another alternative or wait for a decision of the Supreme Court. And some people depend on the known fact that official decisions in Israel are in most cases just recommendations. This means that situations drag for years before decisions are implemented.

Giora Romm, director general of the Israel civil aviation authority, recently said that the proposed alternative in Megido is not the right one. So how come that in spite of such a clear-cut opinion from the senior aviation regulator, the process continues?

Have I mentioned stupidity ?