



Editorial



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Industry Working Together?

The civil aviation industry seems under constant attack. Outside events such as volcanic ash, terrorism and pandemics need to be addressed, that is true of all businesses; but it also seems to be in fashion to attack our industry on environmental, tax and regulatory grounds, too.

As the recent widespread closure of European airspace clearly demonstrated, civil aviation is a crucial part of the infrastructure of our society. Many parts of the world are not accessible in any other way; many industries could not exist without airline connections and it became clear that even on a temporary basis, the other transport modes are not capable of replacing air transport within Europe.

Current issues at European level include the response to the volcanic eruption and ash in the sky; the incredible levels of security regulation which are imposed by law but paid for by the industry; the poorly consulted draft of the new Accident Investigation Regulation; implementation of the emissions trading scheme and further negotiations to liberalise the air transport agreements with other countries. On all of these issues, the European representatives of the airlines, the airports, the air navigation service providers have very similar views to the representatives of the employees.

ECA has repeatedly sought to develop relationships with our European counterparts, so that we are better able to quickly develop joint positions. This is important to demonstrate a whole industry view on key issues. We are sometimes successful, as with a recent position on the treatment of safety data (sometimes called 'just culture') and most notably in 2000 to solve the problem of a working time directive for mobile staff in civil aviation.

Volcanic Ash Does not Cloud the Pilot's Role

The eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano caused havoc in European air transport. It left millions of passengers stranded for days and even weeks, waiting for the ash cloud to dissipate over Europe. Whilst discussions focused on how to re-open the airspace, one essential element was hardly touched upon: the aircraft Captain is finally responsible for the safe conduct of a flight. Pilots are selected, trained and licensed to take these 'life and death' decisions. However they need to have the proper tools and training to perform the job and as far as volcanic ash is concerned this still is a problem.

The effect of the eruption on the functioning of European air transport was very dramatic and unforeseen. Was widespread closure of the airspace an overreaction or a necessary approach based on the 'safety first' principle – a principle which is at the center of ECA's work? Flying on a European Commercial Airliner is one of the safest pastimes we undertake in our lives – and it is this way because of the safety-first principle. We should never abandon it to chase profit or convenience.

Since the crisis, many meetings have been organised and there are many more to come. ICAO has instigated an International Volcanic Ash Task Force. Eurocontrol established a Volcanic Ash central safety data collection point, with the aim of collecting and analysing post flight data. The aim is to learn lessons in order to improve safety, flight efficiency and capacity within the specific volcanic ash environment. On May 4 an extraordinary EU Council of the Ministers of Transport decided on a list of actions including the creation of a crisis coordination unit and an aviation group gathering all aviation stakeholders at European level to follow-up the crisis measures.

The Council also agreed on the need to swiftly establish binding limits, at EU level, which clearly define the safety envelope for engines and aircraft as regards

the risk of volcanic ashes. The importance of this decision cannot be emphasised enough. Certification is the basis of everything: the first question that needs a clear, scientific and satisfactory answer is what concentration of volcanic ash is tolerated by both the engines and the airframe.

The definition of an upper limit for ash density in which it is considered safe to fly is just the start. How is this defined? How is it measured and/or predicted? What extra checks are necessary

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on the engines and airframe following flight in such low density ash? What extra inspections should be carried out? When should flight crew report such flights and to whom? What extra training, reporting and procedures are necessary and for which members of the safety chain? Airline management, flight planners, ATC/flow controllers, engineers, meteorologists, volcanologists and of course, flight crew?

ECA will support the decision makers, bringing to the table the expertise of our member associations, which draw on the experience of more than 38,000 professional pilots. Because our members are committed to protecting passenger safety – not just out of a sense of professionalism, but because it is also their own lives at risk. ■



EU Air Accident Investigations at Crossroads

When 13 major aviation stakeholder groups – including the renowned Flight Safety Foundation – issued their joint Declaration, in late April, their message was clear: EU decision-makers must ensure the independence of accident investigations and protect sensitive safety data. Otherwise, accident investigations will not be able to play their role – learning from past accidents to prevent future ones. Regrettably, the Council of Transport Ministers is unlikely to listen – which would leave aviation safety and Europe's travelling public as the big losers.

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I believe there is much more scope for developing a strong, comprehensive industry voice on many more issues; having an impact which exceeds the sum of our individual efforts. This requires us to take a mature view of those issues on which we have disagreements and focus more on those areas where agreement between us has a positive impact. The response to volcanic ash restrictions, security regulation, accident investigation, emissions trading and many of the technical issues addressed by EASA are fertile ground for us to cooperate. ECA is willing to further develop these relationships – it is in the interests of our members, the airline associations' members, and the EU Institutions that we do. But mostly it is in our *industry's* interests. ■

The joint Declaration came just a few days before the European Parliament's Transport Committee debated the Commission proposal for a new EU Regulation on Accident investigations. The debate showed that the Parliamentarians consider the proposal as a unique opportunity to establish this Regulation as one of the key building blocks of Europe's aviation safety architecture. A unique opportunity to have independent accident investigations act as key drivers for safety improvements.

The Parliament understands that such safety improvements will only be possible, if the Regulation guarantees that the accident investigation is independent from the judicial authorities and that sensitive safety information from that investigation is adequately protected. Otherwise, aviation safety professionals – including pilots – who are keen to participate in accident investigations would be forced to remain silent, to ensure their

testimony is not used against them in subsequent judicial proceedings.

But while Parliament is expected to adopt changes that would allow accident investigators to do their job properly, these changes must not run into a brick wall, when encountering the Council of Ministers. Ministers appear to support changes that would undermine the safety investigation's independence and lift some crucial protection of sensitive safety data. If maintained, Europe's Transport Ministers risk producing an empty shell – a Regulation that forced safety professionals to remain silent.

The disclosure of the Cockpit Voice Recorder transcripts from the 2008 Spanair accident, and their subsequent publication in major Spanish newspapers, in May this year, are just a sad reminder of how things can go wrong – and will go wrong – if the Transport Ministers don't rethink their position. ■



For more information, please visit ECA special web page: http://www.eurocockpit.be/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=794

Next Meetings

- 19-20 May:** ECA Executive Board Meeting, Brussels, BE
- 19 May:** EU-US Joint Committee, Paris
- 20-22 May:** EASA OPS.001 Review, Cologne, DE
- 24-25 May:** EU-Latin America Summit, Rio, BR
- 25 May:** EASA Safety Standard Consultative Committee, Cologne, DE
- 25-26 May:** EASA OPS.055, Cologne
- 27 May:** ECA Expert Meeting on UAV, Brussels, BE
- 28 May:** EASA Safety Advisory Committee, Cologne, DE
- 7-11 June:** IFALPA Safety Week, Helsinki, FI
- 10 June:** ECA Flight Time Limitations WG, Brussels, BE

The **European Cockpit Association** is the association of Flight Crew Unions from European States. Based in Brussels, ECA has 38 Member Associations, representing over **38.650** pilots from 38 countries.

For more information: www.eurocockpit.be.

Keep the Balance

Last month, the Swedish Air Accident Investigation Board (SHK) issued the final report of an incident that took place at Åre/Östersund (Sweden) in July 2007. The incident is not relevant in terms of damage or severity because neither passengers nor the aircraft suffered major damage. The airplane involved in this incident was operated by an airline with an Air Operator Certificate (AOC) issued by a member country of the European Union. This airline was also involved in a more serious incident in Lanzarote (Spain) a few months before (June 2007). Coincidentally, the final report of this incident has also been recently released.

The incident reports note one relevant factor in common: the lack of operational control by this airline. This means that certain procedures of this airline were unsafe and were uncovered only after the investigation of these incidents. Both accident investigation authorities (Swedish and Spanish) have recommended that EASA (European Aviation Safety Agency) evaluate the methods, controls and oversight followed by the National Civil Aviation Authorities related to variations of the AOC for a specific airline.

We are talking about a European airline overseen and controlled by European authorities under European regulations—not one of the famous EU "Black List" airlines. European aviation safety is not in question. Europe has one of the best safety records in aviation worldwide. There's no point in blaming any particular airline, especially when this airline has substantially changed many of its procedures and activities. The "name & shame" has shown to be a useless tool in safety improvement.

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However, as aviation professionals as well as European citizens, we wonder if National Aviation Authorities in Europe have the resources needed to accomplish the tasks inherent to safety oversight and control of their national airlines. The economic impact of the air transport sector in many European countries is enormous. These countries benefit from the tourism and businesses that would not be possible without the airlines' involvement.

However, airlines can only deliver profitability if they deliver safety. Having successfully created a much more competitive aviation market, Europe's politicians must ensure that their Aviation Authorities are properly resourced to enable them, in turn, to ensure that passengers do not need to consider each airline's safety records.

ECA is not the first organisation to realise that unless the accident rate continues to reduce, then the financial health of the sector will not be maintained or improved. Aviation safety is a pre-requisite of profitable and sustainable airlines. ■

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