



Europe's pilots are united!

by Dirk Polloczek



First I would like to thank the 37 pilot associations in Europe for electing me as the new President of the European Cockpit Association. It's a great honour and responsibility for me to take this position and work for the future of Europe's aviation.

More than 38.000 European pilots are united in 37 associations and under the umbrella of ECA. When joining these associations, pilots do not only look for representation when it comes to negotiating salaries or duty times. No. Pilots do proactively work in their association's expert groups on improving aviation safety, security and infrastructure. From the beginning of our industry as we know it today, pilots were involved in finding the right answers for the many different problems in aviation. These solutions – of course – had to be found under a transnational scope, as our industry always was and will be transnational.

The 38.000 European pilots help to connect countries, regions and cities within and outside of Europe. They help to build this important infrastructure, which is a driving motor of the pan-European economy. Nearly every day that they spend at work, they can see our continent from above

and they can see how close together we all live. But they also understand that our industry is unthinkable without transnational rules and regulations. Or could you imagine what aviation would look like, if its rules would change at every borderline that an airplane crosses? Surely not!

Under these premises aviation was able to find transnational solutions to significantly increase safety and to reduce accident rates. Especially in Europe the industry did an excellent job, as here these rates are among the lowest worldwide.

But today, we seem to be unable to find rules for the future of our industry. Especially here in Europe, we see the spreading of unfair competition, social dumping and outsourcing in aviation. State-owned airlines from third countries enjoy unfair competitive advantages, while European airlines are restricted by European laws. Pilots and cabin crew are hired via Far-Eastern contracting companies and based outside Europe, just to avoid taxation and social contributions. The flight crew fluctuation in some airlines has grown so much that their training departments are constantly running at their limits.

What interest should a pilot have in the future of his/her airline, when she/he plans to leave it anyhow? Why should such a pilot try to improve its safety culture? Why help building its safety management? Why should she/he do all this, when they are not a full employee of this airline, but on an unstable temporary contract or even fake self-employed?

Do we really believe that this industry would have reached today's safety levels with these practices being used?

In the aftermath of the European financial crisis, the intra-continental connectivity in aviation has gone down for the first time. This should ring the alarm bell for decision-makers in Europe. Aviation is vitally important for Europe's joint economy.

Together with the ECA Board and staff, we are determined to do everything we can to build a reliable and trustworthy industry, which provides an excellent safety culture and quality employment for all. And we start today!

Managing fatigue risk: mission improbable?

When it comes to mitigating the risks of pilot fatigue, sticking to Europe's Flight Time Limitations rules alone is not an option anymore. Instead, Fatigue Risk Management (FRM) is supposed to complement the prescriptive rules and to offer additional protection against fatigue, as explained in an ECA Position Paper.

Since October 2014, Safety Management System (SMS), including FRM are expected to be reality in every European airline. No doubt this will be a paradigm shift, not to mention a great challenge for all involved in the process of implementation. From the rostering and safety department's point of view, it will not be sufficient anymore to schedule a flight duty by simply sticking to the prescriptive limits, set by EU legislation. In addition to that, a risk assessment on fatigue will have to be performed for the flight duties in accordance with the Safety Management System procedures.

However, observation of many ECA experts, who participated in the FRM Workshop held at EASA last month, is that FRM might remain an unachievable aspiration. The lack of detailed guidelines for the implementation of a mature SMS and FRM, lack of expertise in many National Aviation Authorities (NAAs) and the unwillingness of some airlines to apply FRM for genuine safety enhancement, threaten to undermine this tool. To add fuel to the fire, SMS and FRM have to be seen as the premises of a future EASA performance-based environment, which focuses on desired, measurable safety outcomes, rather than only a mechanic compliance with prescriptive limits or procedures. This makes it particularly difficult for operators and NAAs to oversee the implementation of FRM. With these challenges in mind, FRM is facing a tough time. Letting it fail, however, is not an option for pilots, who consider this an essential tool to manage fatigue risk.

'Fake', 'cheap', 'unfair' – the many faces of competition in Europe

Social dumping, fake "self-employed" pilots, pay-2-fly schemes, cheap aircraft and cheaper fuel, and "flags of convenience": these are some of the many forms of unfair competition in aviation worldwide. While the term "unfair competition" doesn't need much explanation, the schemes used by some airlines – in

Europe and across the world – need to be put in the spotlight and must be stopped before they destroy the industry in Europe.

A new ECA publication reveals the many market distorting practices which airlines are increasingly keen to adopt. While some of those practices are verge of being illegal, many others are simply stemming from legislative loopholes. This is the case with new 'business' models, which cherry pick among different national regulatory regimes and uneven (safety) oversight. Norwegian Air International is one prime example but there are more. On the other end of the continuum, are practices, such as pilots who are obliged to set up their own limited liability company or fake self-employed pilots. If those practices are allowed to flourish and spread, they will be highly detrimental to Europe's aviation.

Distorting competition is also a serious problem when it comes to carriers from outside Europe. Their unlimited (financial) resources, access to state-of-the-art airport infrastructure, weak social legislation and employees,



who can barely rely on basic labour standards, offer them competitive advantages which are not available to their EU competitors. While non-EU carriers are not bound to play by the same rules, competition will continue to be unfair.

These trends are highly worrying. But there are solutions to (re)establishing a level playing field. The ECA publication shows that stopping unfair competition is not only necessary and urgent, but also feasible.

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Piloting Safety

ECA is the representative body of European pilot associations, representing over 38.000 pilots from across Europe

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