



My farewell editorial

by Nico Voorbach

It is almost unbelievable how fast 4 years have passed as I am writing today my last editorial as an ECA President. In the past years I had the privilege to work with dedicated staff and volunteer pilots. With my second term coming to an end, I have decided not to stand for re-election at ECA's next General Assembly in November.

It will be impossible to write about all the issues we worked on, the battles we won and the ones we were less successful in. Maybe, the best known issue is the Flight Time Limitations campaign. FTL is symbolic of our struggle for higher aviation safety levels. Most of you have followed this campaign closely or participated in our battle for safe & science-based FTL rules.

But in the past years we have worked on numerous dossiers, defending flight safety and fair working conditions for pilots. ECA's contributions to the revision of the EU Occurrence Reporting Regulation, updating aviation Security Regulations, fighting bogus self-employment, establishing new social security rules for crews and the Social Dialogue, to name just a few, are concrete examples of the work done in ECA and how this contributes to safer and sustainable aviation.

There are – and will continue to be – key issues which continue to require ECA's full attention and swift action. Two of them are particularly important and critical because they concern the way in which the aviation industry will develop in the next years: unfair competition and the emergence of problematic new 'business models'. These can influence and deteriorate our employment models in the near future and have the potential to destroy our European airlines.

In the past year, ECA worked intensively on the issue of unfair competition and now it will seek support from the new European Commission and EU Parliament to address this complex problem. Regarding unfair competition, we will have to deal with the further expansion of competition from, for example, the Middle Eastern airlines that are

sponsored and partly financed by their Governments. In the European Union, State subsidies are restricted. But when "Third Country" operators can offer far lower prices due to their unfair financial advantages this distorts competition and risks pushing EU airlines – and the employment they provide – out of the market. The EU has to address this challenge; otherwise in 5 to 10 years there will be no genuine European aviation industry left.

The boom of "innovative business models" is also a worrying trend, which is high on the ECA radar. We already raised concerns that complex business set ups can have significant adverse safety implications. We just recently saw a clear example that complex, transnational business models combined with shrinking resources in the national safety oversight authorities can lead to dangerous – and potentially disastrous – situations.

In addition to those challenges, ECA has a multitude of other but not less important dossiers. Two of them are covered in this Cockpit News: Crew Resource Management (CRM) Training, and improving predictability in flight paths. The next ECA President will continue our efforts to find a sustainable solution for a competitive airline industry. I am handing over a team of committed Board Directors and ECA staff, many experts and volunteer pilots who are dedicated to "Piloting Safety". I am confident that with the support of ECA staff and Member Associations, the European pilot community will be in safe hands!

Steep learning curve for new Transport Commissioner

The EU has a new Transport Commissioner – her candidacy came as a surprise, her colourful CV – as well. A closer look reveals she might be just what EU's transport sector needs – outside-the-box thinker who is up for some big challenges.

Violeta Bulc, a 50-year-old entrepreneur with an IT masters and less than a month experience as a Minister in Slovenia

will serve as the new Transport Commissioner in the Juncker Commission[1]. Prior to her nomination for the position, Ms Bulc was little-known both at home and in Brussels. But that changed almost overnight. Her blog and rather vibrant personal experience attracted attention: a political novice, trained as a shaman and fire-walker with no “Transport” experience.

Yet her lack of industry experience might not necessarily be an obstacle. She passed the hearing in the European Parliament Transport Committee only after 4 days of preparation. She managed to convince EU deputies that she is fit for the “job”, mapping out existing issues in the transport sector and speaking passionately about the priorities. Bulc also did not shy away from taking a stance against social dumping, one of the nagging problems in the entire transport sector, including aviation.

The EU Commission, which has taken office on 1 Nov, will be in place for a five year term. Ms Bulc will take charge of a considerable number of unfinished projects: ranging from the Single European Sky to the 4th railways package. The Commissioner will then face the real challenge to get in-depth understanding about this very broad portfolio and propose strategic solutions. Aviation, only one of the pillars in transport in addition to road, maritime and rail, has a long list of issues that need attention. Social dumping, Flags of Convenience, Single European Sky, safety oversight, pilot training issues and air transport agreements with 3rd countries are only topping the list. ECA is looking forward to working with the new Commissioner, shifting the focus from problems to their solutions.

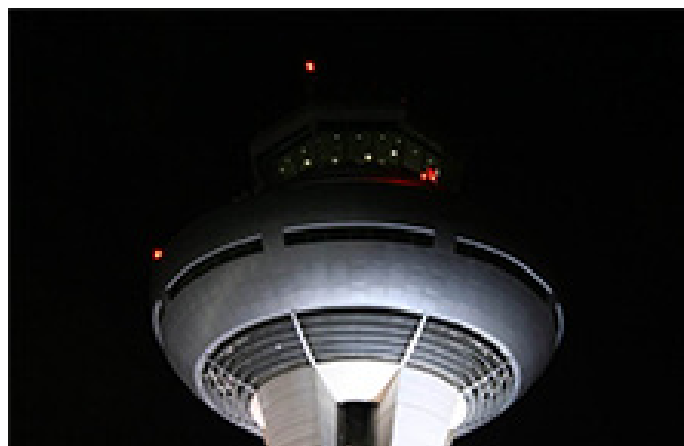
Remote Towers – big potential but only if safe and secure

Last week, a Swedish airport received the first ever license to control planes through a remote tower at an airport located somewhere else. European pilots recognise that such Remote Tower Services (RTS) will be part of future air operations and can bring potential benefits if – and only if – they guarantee an equivalent or higher level of flight safety, compared to local air traffic control. With demand for such remote services growing and technology advancing, it is therefore time for regulators and industry – including pilots – to carefully evaluate the RTS concept and its technology.

To contribute to the debate, ECA today released an assessment and position paper on RTS, their advantages, drawbacks and conditions for their safe and sustainable introduction into the air transport system.

Commenting on the ECA position paper, ECA President Nico Voorbach stated: “Aviation is by definition a sector driven by groundbreaking technologies and constant innovation. This is why we as pilots are always open-minded for new technologies and are willing to work together with industry to ensure RTS meets – and even improves – the safety of our flight operations,” says Voorbach, who is an active pilot himself. “This is why we identified a number of areas where further work is needed to ensure that RTS operations don’t pose safety risks and don’t lose their attractiveness.”

Remote Tower Services allow air traffic control at an airport to be performed remotely, i.e. somewhere else than in the local control tower, making use of high-tech video and sensor equipment. Their core value is to overcome geographical limitations, allowing smaller airfields or rural airports with few aircraft movements to be upgraded to fully controlled ones. Also, war zones or areas where infrastructure has been destroyed, could be provided with such remote ATC services.



At the same time, as any new technology, there are areas of concern. “Remote tower services – if introduced on a wider scale – will change the way we operate”, says Álvaro Gammicchia, ECA Technical Board Director. “This means we need to think strategically and develop new common standards, recommended practices, and flight procedures to ensure safe and secure operations. For example, new methods for separation of aircraft and an airspace re-design might be necessary, as well as adequate contingency measures and procedures in case of hardware malfunction. Cyber security and protecting data transfers between aircraft and ground from hacking or viruses is another essential area of concern. All in all, we know that there are vast challenges, but there are also solutions.”



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

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