



ECA
Piloting Safety

A quest for solutions or causing more problems?

by Nico Voorbach

As I am writing this article the Boeing 777 flight MH370 that disappeared on 8 March has still not been found. This is distressing for all the relatives from the people on board, the aviation industry, pilots and the general public as a whole.

How can we explain that in times when there are more than 1000 satellites in space, and technology tracks almost every move we make, we have not found any trace of this aircraft?

The disappearance of MH370 illustrates that live tracking of commercial aircraft is far behind the technical possibilities that exist today. For this reason regulators, airlines, pilots and the public are calling for a reliable system for the tracking of aircraft. This is a good thing. When something goes wrong it is of utmost importance that search and rescue teams find the aircraft and its survivors as soon as possible. Increasing the life of the batteries of location beacons is also a welcome and necessary step in that direction.

But now the regulators have also felt an urgency to increase exponentially the recording times of Cockpit Voice Recorders (CVR) from 2 to 20 hours. [A new EASA opinion](#), which ECA is currently evaluating, has been published in early May. While it can be argued how this could be practically implemented or whether it will be useful at all, we know for sure that increasing the recording time will certainly have a negative impact on the privacy of pilots during their work.

When pilots agreed to record their conversations in the cockpit in the 1960s, it was under the provision that it would be used solely for accident investigations. It was after the investigation of the 1960 crash of Trans Australia Airlines Flight 538 at Mackay (Queensland) that the inquiry judge strongly recommended that flight recorders be installed in all airliners. We, as pilots, agreed to this as we understand the need to learn from what happened during an accident or incident. It can prevent future similar events. No other profession in the world allows recordings during their work

– not even surgeons – where cameras have the potential to help learn from past mistakes.

However, since then we see that those recordings risk becoming public, being used in newspapers, TV reports, books, movies and judicial investigations. And increasing the CVR recording duration 10 times also increases the risk that big amounts of recordings end up in the public domain.

New technologies give us the tools to improve aviation safety. But let's assess the pros and cons of longer CVR recording times and how the data can be adequately protected. And above all, let's first find the MH370 to solve the mystery we have at hand now.

European elections: highlights



Last month's European Parliament elections across Europe will generate substantive changes in who makes the decisions affecting Europe's citizens. A surge of Eurosceptic votes and a winning centre-right across Europe have sent a strong message to Brussels. Over the next months, experts will continue to analyse the results and offer predictions about the future of the EU. In the meantime, we have summarized for you the key takeaways from these elections.

“Crisis averted”

On 26 May, Europe woke up to hear that we reversed the trend of ever lower voter turnout at European Elections. For the first time in 30 years the number of voters has increased. “Voter apathy halted”, “Crisis averted” – read a few of the headlines. But a closer look reveals that voter turnout has increased by only 0.1%, which is a very low benchmark of success. [Read more...](#)

A new group might be born

Even though the mainstream European political groups – EPP (conservative), S&D (social democrat) & ALDE (liberal) - remain the dominant players, far-right and eurosceptics have made major gains. Marine Le Pen’s French FN, Geert Wilders’ Dutch Party for Freedom, the Freedom Party of Austria, Italy’s Lega Nord, and Belgium’s Vlaams Belang have already announced efforts to form a new Parliamentary Group. They will need at least two more MEPs from different EU countries before being able to form a new far-right group in the European Parliament. [Read more...](#)

An unprecedented power struggle is rolling out in Brussels

The system of “Spitzenkandidaten” – candidates to follow Mr. Barroso as the next Commission President – was an impressive campaigning tool. But now that the EPP has overall won the elections and their lead candidate Jean-Claude Juncker, claimed victory, EU leaders have become less vocal in their support for Juncker. On the other side of the equation – the Parliamentarians were quick to issue a declaration in support of this lead candidate. This set off an unprecedented power struggle between EU Parliament and EU State leaders. Officially, Juncker continues to be the lead candidate but EU leaders might come up with a different “name” by the end of June. Who will prevail – Parliament or EU State leaders – remains to be seen.

Farewell to Kallas

Europe is also saying “farewell” to Transport Commissioner Siim Kallas. Throughout the summer new Commissioners will be nominated by EU Member States. In September, the nominees will be questioned by the European Parliamentarians on their knowledge, skills and vision for the future.

[Full article available on www.eurocockpit.be](http://www.eurocockpit.be)

Forecasting change: Pilots’ vision on weather

Here is a forecast that pilots and operational staff would like to hear: in the next few years, they will no longer have to deal with black-and-white SigWx (Significant Weather) Charts and alphanumeric text messages (SIGMET, METAR, TAF). Instead, real-time, essential, continuously updated weather information will be uplinked and presented in the cockpit in a graphical, user-friendly manner and in higher-resolution. Weather-related “nuisance” disrupting the efficiency of operations or endangering flight safety would thereby be reduced to the minimum. Many of these critical and highly desirable changes – outlined in a new publication – are due to happen in the SESAR-driven transition towards a more efficient Air Traffic Management.

Based on trajectory and time management the future European Air Traffic Management system will require a much higher level of predictability and accuracy. This means that consistent, almost real time meteorology (MET) data must be available at the flight deck.

Today, however, pilots receive meteorological flight documentation before departure. At the moment of take-off, data is already a few hours old. Weather also accounts for over 70% of all air traffic delays and disruptions, both in Europe and within the US. According to the US FAA two thirds of delays is preventable with better weather information.

But as ICAO’s Annex 3 – governing the provisions for meteorological information – has not yet standardised or defined its visualisation, much of the available information comes in black-and-white, non-user friendly traditional flight crew briefing.

To raise awareness and address these challenges, a new publication reflecting the European pilots’ vision on weather, calls for better weather information.

‘Better weather information’ encompasses a complete rethinking of MET data production and distribution. Having consistent and reliable information, before and during the flight, available to multiple users, disseminated in seconds should be seen not only as a wish – or cutting edge project of the future – but as a minimum standard for operations.

[Full article available on www.eurocockpit.be](http://www.eurocockpit.be) & www.sesarju.eu



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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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