



The safer way

by Nico Voorbach

In all that we do – we, pilots, are looking for a safer way: using safer technology, finding a safer way to fly, performing safer operations. It is a constant uphill struggle. But the past month has seen a few notable examples of our efforts paying off. We have seen the publication of new European-wide aviation safety legislation and a landmark court case decision that reaffirms our belief in the importance of Just Culture for air safety. We have also red-flagged some potential safety implications of HEMS operations in Europe.

The most important news came on 16 April when a Dutch Court announced its decision to dismiss Ryanair's defamation complaint against the Dutch TV station KRO. In two programs called "Mayday Mayday" the TV station showed 4 Ryanair pilots raising serious concerns about the company culture and its implications for safety. We, in ECA, now hope that Regulators, like the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) and the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), will consider this decision as serious enough to start an independent investigation when pilots are raising such concerns. It is my strong belief that in an airline there should be an open culture based on trust. This gives the pilots the confidence that when they take safety decisions based on their experience and operational knowledge, it will always be supported by the airline management.

This Cockpit News also brings to your attention that the EU-wide [Occurrence Reporting Regulation](#), for which ECA has been an essential stakeholder contributing to the thinking process, has been officially published in EU's Official Journal. This marks the end of a successful legislative process and hopefully the beginning of ever safer system for collecting and analysing safety information in Europe, to prevent further accidents

Further, our experts on Helicopter operations have brought two important safety issues to our attention. Now we will keep working to bring those points to the attention of EASA and Member States!

Last but not least, we are now more than two months since the disappearance of Malaysian flight MH370. Still there is no evidence what happened to this flight and

its occupants. I really feel the distress of the relatives of passengers and crew on board and hope that the aircraft will be found soon. Our thoughts are with the missing crew and passengers and their relatives and friends!

“Act. React. Impact” for safer aviation

One could hardly argue with Nick Clegg's (MEP) comment that there are many legitimate criticisms to be made of the European Parliament, but irrelevance or lack of importance should certainly not be among those. In the past year only, the European Parliament has adopted important legislation, such as the Flight Time Limitations rules, the Occurrence Reporting Regulation, and recently the Posted Workers Directive. These three pieces of legislation affect almost every aspect of the everyday life for pilots – how long they



work, where they pay their taxes and how to maintain aviation safe. That alone is a solid reason for all pilots to cast a vote on 22-25 May at the next European Parliament Elections. Left, right, Eurosceptic or not, for the next Parliament to be successful it will need strong leadership, ability to see the “bigger picture” and to learn from its past mistakes.

Strong leadership would allow the next European Parliament to look beyond the surface and take informed

decisions, even on (seemingly) technical issues. A good test case will be the ability of the next Parliament to stop the [watering down of pilot training standards](#). Putting a halt to reduced flying hours, greater reliance on simulators and aircraft automation, and new inventive types of licenses is an area which needs attention today.

The future 751 Member of the European Parliament (MEPs) should also be able to “see the bigger picture” and not fall in the traps of buzz words such as “cheap” airline tickets and “competition”. [Competition among airlines is good](#). But it has started turning into a “race to the bottom” with more and more companies pursuing social dumping and “forum shopping” to benefit from light regulation and favourable taxation in countries that serve them as “flag of convenience”. The abuse of highly complex “innovative” business models and the use of fake self-employment distort the level playing field and put European jobs at risk.

Hopefully, the next Parliament will learn from past mistakes, such as the financial crisis in 2008. If the same principles of ‘light touch’, ‘performance-based’ and ‘self-regulation’ are applied to air travel, [the consequences would be alarming](#). This trend can only be countered by strengthening the EU’s air safety legislation, and by providing effective safety oversight (by skilled safety professionals) and by a well-resourced European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

A crew of two or just too few?

There are no two opinions when it comes to the challenging nature of HEMS (Helicopter Emergency Medical Services) operations. Helicopters are difficult aircraft to fly, but HEMS operations are even more challenging. They are performed at low levels and outside controlled airspace at off-field landing sites, often without radar coverage and difficulties related to the operation type itself. This is why the general rule – underscored by a set of EASA rules – is to perform HEMS operations at night with a crew of two skilled, well-trained and alert pilots. With one exception: “Specific Geographical Areas” where a single-pilot operation with the assistance by an on-board HEMS technical crew member is allowed under certain circumstances.

But one question remains to be settled. What qualifies as a “Specific Geographical Area” (SGA) and can an entire country of e.g. 357,021 square kilometers – the territory of Germany– be “specific” enough for a pilot to be well familiar with typical landmarks and local meteorological conditions?

The concept of Specific Geographical Area has been established to allow single pilot daytime operations to return to their base after sunset. It is also clear from the guidance material that if the cultural lighting and topography would require instrument and control monitoring, operations have to be conducted with two crew members. Having a trained second crew member helps to mitigate some of the major safety issues for night flying – e.g. loss of control in flight, controlled flight into terrain and spatial disorientation.

However, several countries have recently defined such broad “Specific Geographical Areas” that it goes diametrically against the spirit and the letter of EASA’s Regulation on Operations (365/2012). For example, Switzerland issued approval to use the whole territory of the country plus the southern part of Germany as an SGA. As a consequence Swiss HEMS helicopters can operate in this area with a single pilot at night. This set a precedent: Germany and Austria followed suit and extended their SGA over their whole territory as well.

An SGA extended to a whole country will always include large areas where relying on visual landmarks at night will be difficult – if not impossible –especially when a flight is conducted under minimal visual conditions. Whereas the SGA is a specific concept and not intended to open the airspace for general single pilot-night operations, the lack of clarity as to what could be defined as an SGA leaves too much space for misinterpretation and, ultimately, misuse.

ECA’s [latest position paper](#) warns against this tendency and urges EASA to clearly define the term “Specific Geographical Area”. Equally important, it calls upon local authorities to take measures and reduce SGAs to a maximum of 50 to 70 NM around the bases – a realistic and safer range for a crew of less than two.



ECA
Piloting Safety

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

European Cockpit Association AISBL – Piloting Safety
Rue du Commerce 20-22 / B-1000 Brussels
www.eurocockpit.be / communications@eurocockpit.be

Copyright © 2014 European Cockpit Association