

Cologne, 26.01.2016

Subject: European alerting system on Risks to Civil Aviation in Conflict Zones

EASA, the European authority for aviation safety

The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) was established in 2002 as an Agency of the European Union (EU). Its mission is to provide the EU citizens safe air travel in Europe and worldwide. The main activities of EASA include:

- certification of aviation products,
- development of common safety and environmental rules on European level,
- oversight of approved organizations,
- oversight of and support to Member States in fields where EASA and Member States have shared competence (e.g. Air Operations, Air Traffic Management) and
- safety management and analysis activities at European level.

The Agency staff is composed of more than 700 aviation experts and administrators from all EU Member States. The headquarters is in Cologne (Germany) with an office in Brussels and three international permanent representations in Washington (USA), Montreal/ICAO (Canada) and Beijing (China). As an Agency of the European Union, EASA is a body governed by European public law; it is distinct from the EU Institutions and has its own legal personality. It is independent from any vested or political interest in its safety-related decision making.

Risks in Conflict zones

Since the tragic event of the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 there is a general consensus that States should share their information about possible risks in conflict zones. In the current climate of political unrest in many parts of the world, airlines have expressed a need for a consolidated picture of the safety and security situation. Also, it was recognised that a level playing field for all airlines is required to protect all passengers.

Several initiatives have been taken to inform airlines about the risks on their international flights. At global level, ICAO has launched since April 2015 a central repository where each State can notify its information about a particular risk in a conflict zone. Although the repository allows some form of information exchange, some limitations have been identified in the sense that risk assessments are carried out on national level only with no clear agreed methodology, there is a potential for diverging views on a specific conflict situation and the timeliness with which information is published. In Europe, the need was identified to create an alternate information sharing, risk assessment and distribution process taking place along pan-European lines.

Actions taken since MH17

One of main identified areas for improvement at European level is the need for availability, in a timely manner, of information on a common risk picture to support national Authorities and operators in their own decision making processes. No single State has a comprehensive and objective view on all conflict zones. Current state publications are based on national risk assessments only. This results in no single consistent message being available to all airlines.

Since June 2015 EASA has taken up the initiative to issue Safety Information Bulletins (SIBs) in which it draws the attention to communications issued by Civil Aviation Authorities (CAA). Before doing so, it cross-checks the appropriateness and relevance of an EU initiative with national authorities, the Eurocontrol Network Manager and airlines. So far, EASA has issued SIBs for the following countries/regions¹: Ukraine, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Mali, North Sinai, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia. These SIBs are, for the moment, purely factual in that they call attention to specific decisions taken by a State without giving recommendations to operators, who retain the responsibility for their own decisions and operational choices.

In September 2015, EASA has organised together with the Romanian Civil Aviation Authority a high level conference in Bucharest to discuss how to achieve more consistency in the advice offered to airlines in order to protect the interest of EU citizens both inside and outside Europe. This conference was, for the first time, gathering representatives from Military authorities, intelligence services, EU institutions, National civil aviation authorities, and airlines.

As a follow-up to this conference, EASA has initiated in November 2015 the creation of a European-level task force to consider ways in which the exchange of knowledge can be improved. The task force is reviewing the channels, processes and accountabilities for offering guidance on risks, and developing proposals for filling any gaps identified.

The discussions concentrate around the following themes:

- Risk Analysis and Validation of Information,
- Sharing of Information in the EU,
- Dissemination of Information,
- Immediate Reaction / Rapid Alert capability,
- Legal Aspects and Ownership.

The task force intends to deliver by the end of March 2016 its recommendations on the issues described above, including implementation issues. The output will be made available to the Dutch EU Presidency, to respond to earlier discussions at EU Ministerial level on lessons learned from the downing of flight MH17.

¹ <http://ad.easa.europa.eu/sib-docs/page-1>

Towards a fully developed European alerting and information system

Within the EU, Member States are committed to cooperate and share information resulting from risk assessments at national level. The European Parliament encouraged the Commission to support and coordinate these efforts. There is also a clear expectation from the aviation community to be informed in a qualified manner about possible risks on their flight routes.

A fully implemented European alerting and information system on risks to civil aviation in conflict zones should be based on the following principles:

- Uniform level of protection of airlines and citizens of all EU Member States;
- Single information chain available to all actors;
- Common strategic risk assessment of conflict zones;
- Common information and recommendations to airlines;
- Capability to activate these channels on a short notice.

As the EU institutions do not have the required intelligence capabilities, there is a need to join up available national resources and resources at the EU Institutions to implement a European alerting and information system. This would of course not prevent national risk assessments and more conservative national measures nor replace responsibilities of airlines and Member States.

EASA can play an important role in such a centralized European function by relaying certain safety/security information as widely as possible, thereby striving towards more consistency in the advice offered to airlines and protecting of the interest of EU citizens inside and outside Europe. Of course, the EASA SIBs or equivalent information circulars resulting from this process would be further disseminated to ICAO and to the Network Manager in order to allow for a complete information of all relevant aviation actors. Special care needs to be taken of non EU airlines sharing codes with EU airlines, since they do not fall under the oversight responsibility of EU national authorities.
