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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 16: Improvement of safety oversight

THE EUROPEAN CIVIL AVIATION CONFERENCE PROGRAMME FOR SAFETY ASSESSMENT OF FOREIGN AIRCRAFT

(Presented by 41 Contracting States², members of the European Civil Aviation Conference)

INFORMATION PAPER

SUMMARY

This paper presents information on ECAC programme for Safety Assessment of Foreign Aircraft (SAFA).

ACTION BY THE ASSEMBLY

The Assembly is invited to note the information contained in the paper

Background

1. Safety has always been of prime importance to the development of international air transport. During the last ten years, globalisation has had an impact on civil aviation as well as on many other areas. This has increased the need for each State to be able to maintain confidence in the safety oversight provided by other States in discharging their responsibilities within the framework of the Chicago Convention.

¹ French version provided by the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC)

² Albania, Armenia, Austria*, Azerbaijan, Belgium*, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus*, Czech Republic*, Denmark*, Estonia*, Finland*, France*, Germany*, Greece*, Hungary*, Iceland, Ireland*, Italy*, Latvia*, Lithuania*, Luxembourg*, Malta*, Moldova, Monaco, Netherlands*, Norway, Poland*, Portugal*, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia*, Slovenia*, Spain*, Sweden*, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom*.
(Member States of the European Union are indicated with an asterisk in the above list.)

2. In 1996, ICAO began a voluntary programme of safety assessment of national aviation authorities of its member States. ICAO Assembly Resolution A32-11 called for the establishment of a universal safety oversight audit programme, comprised of regular, mandatory, systematic and harmonized safety audits to be carried out by ICAO on all Contracting States. Since 1 January 1999, ICAO has been conducting safety oversight audits of the civil aviation authorities of Contracting States in relation to Annex 1 - *Personnel Licensing*, Annex 6 - *Operation of Aircraft*, and Annex 8 - *Airworthiness of Aircraft*. These audits are designed to determine the level of implementation by States of the critical elements of a safety oversight system and of relevant ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices, associated procedures, guidance material and safety-related practices.

3. In 1996, the European Civil Aviation conference (ECAC) launched its own programme of Safety Assessment of Foreign Aircraft (SAFA), as a complement to ICAO audits. The SAFA programme is based on a bottom-up approach, taking as its starting point ramp inspections of aircraft landing in ECAC States and progressing through further steps to the involvement, as applicable, of the State of Registry or State of Operator when circumstances so require. ECAC States implement the SAFA programme on a voluntary basis.

4. The linkage between the above two programmes was framed through a Memorandum of Understanding between ICAO and ECAC, signed in November 1997 at presidential level, to achieve mutual support and cooperation. The memorandum was subsequently amended, in May 1999, to take into account the evolution of the ICAO programme towards its universal application.

5. The European Union participates in the SAFA programme and provides some financial support through the European Commission.

Main Features of the Programme

6. The main features of the SAFA programme are:

- a) The bottom-up approach. It starts with ramp inspections on foreign aircraft. The references for these inspections are the standards contained in ICAO Annexes 1, 6 and 8. Also some requirements, stemming from ICAO Regional Supplementary Procedures (e.g., for B-RNAV, RVSM) are checked. The inspections are carried out following a procedure, which is common to all ECAC member States and are then subject of reports, which also follow a common format. In the case of significant irregularities, the operator and the appropriate Aviation Authorities are contacted in order to arrive at corrective measures to be taken not only with regard to the inspected aircraft but also with regard to other aircraft which may be concerned or with regard to other aspects, e.g., operational practices, crew qualification etc., in case of irregularity which is of a generic nature. If the irregularities are of such nature that the safety of the aircraft or its occupants is impaired, corrective actions are required. Normally, the aircraft commander is asked to address the serious deficiencies, which are brought to his attention. In rare cases, where inspectors have reason to believe that the aircraft commander does not intend to take the necessary measures, they will formally ground the aircraft, banning it from further flights until appropriate measures are taken. In some cases, when deficiencies are considered very important, individual ECAC States may decide to impose limitations for the operation or even take action (temporary suspension, revocation) on the entry permit of the aircraft in question.
- b) The non-discriminatory approach. Inspections are carried out on all aircraft not coming under the safety oversight responsibility of the inspecting State, regardless of whether they

come under the surveillance of another ECAC State or a non-ECAC State. In fact over the last few years, around 60% of the SAFA inspections are carried out on aircraft, operated by operators from ECAC States.

- c) The integration within the overall aviation safety system. The programme is not intended to replace or take over from the States of Registry/Operator their responsibilities for safety regulation and oversight. Experience shows that, although limited in their scope and depth, SAFA inspections give a general indication of the safety of foreign operators. Inspections contribute to the safe operation of the particular aircraft, which has been inspected, as operators usually undertake corrective measures with regard to discrepancies discovered, before the flight is resumed. SAFA also provides the opportunity for the Aviation Authorities of the inspecting State and the State of the Operator or the State of Registry to co-operate in resolving specific safety-related problems.
- d) The centralised database. All data from the reports, as well as supplementary information, for example a list of actions undertaken and finalised following an inspection, are stored in a centralised database set up by the Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA), an associated body of ECAC. The central database, which contains at present some 19 000 inspection reports, is particularly useful as it contributes to a rapid flow of information to ECAC States which have an on-line access to it. In June 2004, the database was adapted to be accessible to ECAC member States via a (secure) Internet connection. Information stored in the database also allows for various analyses to be performed, e.g., with regard to SAFA inspection results of particular operators, operators from particular States, particular aircraft types etc., such analyses allowing to identify safety concerns, trends in safety levels and to identify appropriate measures to be undertaken.

Programme functioning

7. The operational aspects of the programme are centrally coordinated by the Joint Aviation Authorities, which also runs on a day-to-day basis the centralised database.

8. Procedures have been developed for the performance of ramp inspections. These are used by inspectors in ECAC Member States when performing the inspections and when filing the reports to the database.

9. Harmonisation of and consistency in the programme's activities are attempted through the application of the following measures:

- a) The provision of central training of SAFA inspectors. So far some 320 inspectors from 34 ECAC States have been trained.
- b) An initiative has been launched to share practical experience between inspectors. An "Inspectors exchange programme" allows inspectors from one ECAC State to visit their colleagues in another ECAC State and to closely witness their working methods.
- c) SAFA National Co-ordinators are designated in all ECAC States to serve as Focal Points on SAFA matters for the National Aviation Authorities. Annual National Co-ordinators meetings are organised at which important SAFA issues are discussed and valuable experience shared.

Features of the year 2003

10. The ramp inspections aim at identifying non compliances with ICAO requirements. These eventual non-compliances, called findings, are considered not only by their number but also by their seriousness. To this end, three categories of findings have been defined: Category 1 (minor finding), Category 2 (significant finding) and Category 3 (major finding). Categories relate to the level of deviation from the ICAO Standard. They are the basis for actions by the inspecting State, these actions being also grouped into classes.

11. In 2003, twenty seven ECAC States performed around 3400 inspections of some 623 different operators from 131 States, operating 172 different (sub) types of aircraft. The general picture emerging from the database is that on average one finding is made during each inspection, this ratio being stable for the last five years. When breaking down the ratio of findings per inspection into the three categories, the following values are obtained: around 0.5 for Category 1; around 0.4 for Category 2 and around 0.1 for Category 3. In other words, every 10 inspections leads to one major finding that might affect the safety of operation of aircraft. The latter ratio has been quite stable over the last few years, whilst a downward trend has been observed during the same years in Category 1 and 2 findings. In 2003, there were 23 cases, when ECAC States imposed restrictions on aircraft operation, in 20 cases an aircraft was formally grounded until appropriate measures to correct the deficiencies were undertaken and there were 7 cases of entry permit repercussions.

Future action

12. Future action will include continued efforts towards greater uniformity in the implementation of SAFA activities by participating States. This will include improvements to the preparations for the inspections, their execution and reporting, going in parallel with the accompanying improvements to the SAFA database. Expansion of the inspectors exchange programme and greater co-ordination with National Co-ordinators will also be pursued.

13. Information sharing between ECAC States will be improved by introducing harmonised procedures whereby member States will specifically inform each other of safety concerns and will jointly consider developing co-ordinated actions with regard to those concerns.

14. Although ECAC member States widely participate in the programme, new initiatives will be developed to further increase the number of participating States.

15. In a spirit of transparency, while respecting the need for a degree of confidentiality, ECAC publishes on a yearly basis a report describing the main development of the programme and providing an overview of inspections carried-out and trends in findings recorded. Widening of the scope of the SAFA information, provided to different interested parties, e.g., airlines organisations and to the general public, will be considered.

16. In 2004, the European Union adopted a Directive 2004/36/CE on the safety of third country aircraft using Community airports. This instrument becomes applicable from 30 April 2006 onwards and contains provisions broadly similar to the SAFA Programme. Accordingly, adjustments to the SAFA programme will be introduced in order to allow the EU/ECAC Member States to meet, through participation in the SAFA Programme, their Community obligations.