



The perils of going foreign

Harmonisation is all very well – but what are we trying to harmonise? Pat Malone reports from IAOPA's regional meeting in Athens

It's out there... it's coming after you... and there's no place to hide. It's Europe, in all its manifestations – the EC, EASA, Eurocontrol and the Single European Sky, not to mention things you haven't given enough thought to yet, like SESAME.

It makes sense for everyone in Europe to be singing off the same hymn sheet, but some of the most restrictive regimes in the western world are entitled to stick their oars into the rule-making processes of EASA, and we have to be careful that we do not end up with a regulatory framework that will strangle general aviation here as it has done in some Mediterranean countries.

Next to some European regulatory bodies our own CAA looks look like a beacon of enlightenment, common sense and reason. It is a disturbing fact that if EASA were to adopt the CAA's approach to regulation, it would constitute the greatest liberalisation that aviators in some European countries could dream of.



Martin Robinson (right) extends a welcome to IAOPA President Phil Boyer

The danger for countries (mostly northern European) with relatively enlightened regimes is that EASA will find a middle way, and in bringing along those countries (mostly southern European) where general aviation is looked on with undisguised official distaste, it will sell us all short.

These fears were encapsulated by AOPA Sweden delegate Lars Hjelmsberg, who said: "Sweden is continuing to import the bureaucratic mentality of Brussels. In Sweden we have the best of the best – but how can we hope to maintain our standards when we have bad bureaucracy driving out good?"

AOPA UK's Martin Robinson illustrated the problem with a report of a conversation he had with an Italian regulator about consultation. "This guy was genuinely baffled by the idea of consultation, and not a little angry. 'Why must I consult?' he asked me. 'I've been a regulator for 14 years – are you telling me I can't do my job?' That's what we're up against, that's the sort of mentality we have to defeat."

Delegates to the IAOPA regional meeting in Athens were asked to put forward the most pressing problems general aviation in their country faces, and some of them help to put our own problems into perspective.

Greece

There are more GA aircraft based at Biggin Hill than there are in the whole of Greece. All of the country's GA airfields have been closed, the last two to build sports facilities for the Olympics. GA can use a military airfield 135 kms north of Athens, but the military attitude (you may remember the jailing of some British



Think you've got problems? AOPA Greece representatives Yiouli Kalafati and Anton Koutsoudakis

spotters for photographing museum-pieces) is not positive. GA has access to some civil airfields, but many open only when a commercial flight is due – some are open for an hour a day, and in the islands you cannot plan flights because the airfields open for unsynchronised hours. AOPA(Hellas) president Yiouli Kalafati says: "Flight schools cannot operate, activity is declining, we cannot get fuel and to land at a military airfield we must give a week's notice in writing. It's almost impossible to fly into Greece from abroad, and we're trying to convince the government that they're losing money this way."

Cyprus

Cyprus became a member of the EU on May 1st 2004, and its aviation authority arbitrarily decreed that from that day private Cypriot licences were no longer valid, grounding general aviation in the entire country. Pilots were forced to apply for JAR licences, and



Representatives from AOPAs in Switzerland, Sweden, Netherlands, Luxembourg and Lebanon were among those involved

despite pleas to retain the national licence for local flying, it was discontinued. The island's sole general aviation airport was closed in 1991, transferring all flying to the international airport and leading to major problems of access, cost and delay. To make an international flight, you need permission in writing from their regulator a week before your trip.

Turkey

There are only a few hundred GA pilots in the country, and the public perception of GA is of a rich boy's sport. The military has a de facto monopoly on aviation, and while the Turkish Air League is nominally independent, its president is a high-ranking Air Force officer. AOPA Turkey is fighting hard with projects like the Young Eagles programme, which has given flights to hundreds of underprivileged children, but the voice of GA is not loud and is easily ignored.

Lebanon

If you think military control is bad, look at what happens when the airlines take over, as they have in Lebanon. All planes have to have an AOC, which adds greatly to cost. Each pilot must fly 11 "sectors" each year to stay current, and when the three flying clubs in Beirut decided to band together to get an FTO



IAOPA treasurer Peggy van Ootmarsum (Netherlands)



licence, they were forced to close down while they first applied for a school licence from the Department of Education. Their only cross-country option, to Larnaca in Cyprus, has been closed down – IAOPA is working to have Lebanese GA allowed back into Larnaca – so all licences issued in Lebanon are restricted. Avgas is \$2.35 a litre, there's nowhere to go and the small pilot population is shrinking further.

Israel

"Nowhere to go" is also a problem in Israel. "How often can you go to Beersheeba for lunch?" asked Israeli delegate Yaron Efrat. Aviation is controlled by the military – the Israeli Air Force is the same size as the RAF, for a country of six million – and many GA pilots are reservists. Israel, only 10 miles wide at its central choke-point, has 16 airstrips, but the regulations decree there must be a fire engine with six people on board and an ambulance with three people, including a doctor, when you land. Informal arrangements with the air force have circumvented some of the more onerous restrictions, but all VFR is controlled, you must follow specified routes, and airspace can be closed without warning and indefinitely with no reason given. Security is always tight and sometimes bone-headed – some GA pilots had to drive home when they couldn't produce tickets to fly on their own aircraft, and a group of underprivileged children were prevented from flying because the security guard wasn't qualified to check children.

Italy

GA aircraft are subject to a luxury tax in Italy, so there aren't very many of them. Access to airports is a problem – of 98 airports, 50 are closed to GA. VFR altitude restrictions mean that crossing the Alps you have to descend from FL150 to 1,500 feet in a few miles, and flying into the mountains you are faced with ridiculous climbs – a situation that causes accidents. The Italian CAA gold-plates everything to the point where a manufacturer's service bulletin automatically becomes an AD, and the CAA board knows virtually nothing about aviation, numbering among its members some lawyers, a professor of philosophy, an architect and a railway manager.

Spain

In Spain you have to file a flight plan for every flight, even VFR trips around the block, and AOPA Spain is fighting to have this restriction rescinded. Spain is also going through the birth pains of JAR-FCL, and there are real problems of access to airfields.

In general, the situation in northern European countries is better. That's where the majority of GA pilots (and AOPA members) are. Their problems more closely reflect those of the UK – airfield access, user charges, alleged cross-subsidies, European integration.

\$3 billion for GA? No problem!

IAOPA president Phil Boyer's description of the American WAAS system – which refines satellite signals to the point where they can safely be used as landing aids – had many European delegates shaking their heads in wonder.

"The US government has spent \$3 billion on this over nine years, despite the fact that the airlines didn't want it," Mr Boyer said. "There are now 2,000 GPS approaches in the US, allowing approaches to 500 feet and one mile visibility. We've just had the Garmin 480 certified for WAAS approaches.

"My 172 was the first aircraft equipped to use this and I've flown six approaches all the way to the runway with it. If I was low on fuel and had a problem, and visibility was zero I could make a WAAS approach, and when I heard a thump I could pull the throttle – it's that good."

Europe's problems, Mr Boyer said, were in

some ways a vision of a dark future that the US could face if AOPA dropped its guard. "We face the same problems – Meigs Field in Chicago's the same as Tempelhof in Berlin – but it's a matter of degree. The security issues Europe once had, we now have, so Europe sometimes acts as a bellwether for us. Whether it's access issues, environmental issues, security issues, we're all in the same boat – but for some of us, maybe the rocks are further off."

Mr Boyer had travelled to Athens to support AOPA Greece in its campaign to create a better environment for general aviation there. He, AOPA Greece president Yiouli Kalafati and IAOPA deputy vice president Martin Robinson met the Greek ministers of defence, transport, communications and tourism to discuss the reopening of Athens' Hellinikon Airport for general aviation.

Germany

The biggest European AOPA is Germany, but the country is suffering from a debilitating economic depression which has slashed aviation activity by 30 percent in some areas. Airports are under pressure from real estate speculation – AOPA has just co-financed a 50,000 Euro court case which won a three-year reprieve for Berlin's Tempelhof, but many other airfields are threatened. The medical requirements of JAR-FCL are weeding out pilots, particularly instructors, who were deemed to be perfectly healthy under the old system, and one instructor – backed by a petition signed by 800 colleagues – is taking the JAA to court claiming they discriminate illegally against the handicapped.

Austria

JAR-FCL is only now being introduced in Austria, and although the transition is being better-managed than it was in the UK it is throwing up problems that the Austrian regulators, ever-keen to gold plate, would like to seize upon, with airworthiness issues a particular bone of contention.

Sweden

This sounds familiar. The CAA in Sweden is being split in two – airport operations, which make a profit and are being privatised, and all other regulation, which must now pay for itself on a user-pays basis and cannot be "cross-subsidised" by airport operations. You'd have to laugh if it wasn't so serious.

Denmark

Restrictions on access to airports are raising fears for safety, with some airfields closing in the evenings and reducing opportunities for night flying, while user fees are rising as GA is forced to pay for an ever-increasing burden of regulation. AOPA is fighting restrictions on

business aviation – it is illegal to take a passenger on a business trip unless you have an IR, a Class I medical and sundry other qualifications.

Switzerland

Up there in the Alps they're as close to aviation heaven as you can get in Europe. The main problem is that the government wants to impose tax on fuel for international flights, a 30 percent price increase but still cheap by European standards. But the significant point is that because of the lower cost of GA, there are more pilots per capita in Switzerland than elsewhere, and any increase in cost will act to reduce currency and competence. There are also airspace issues, particularly in the Basel and Zurich areas.

Luxembourg and Netherlands put forward familiar problems similar to our own – obsessive security, onerous costs, gold-plating, and AOPA's Martin Robinson summed up the UK's main problems as EASA, the Single European Sky, falling pilot numbers, customs problems (particularly with France, which was not represented at the meeting) and the increasing cost of regulation. In a succinct observation that had many delegates nodding in agreement, he said: "The UK government now treats taxation income as its own by right, while forcing us to pay extra for any services they bestir themselves to provide."

IAOPA kills radio ga-ga

IAOPA has managed to fight off a proposal to force all GA aircraft to equip with 8.33 MHz radios – a plan which could have cost European owners up to £300 million.

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Eurocontrol had decided that it needed 2,300 new frequencies to cope with growing air traffic and proposed that all GA aircraft be equipped with new radios at a cost of up to £6,000 per aircraft.

IAOPA, however, maintains that the existing frequency management system is wasteful and squanders a large proportion of the spectrum – enough to provide for all of aviation's needs for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, it believes it is wrong to make hugely expensive provision for additional frequencies without taking into account likely advances in digital technology and datalinks. It urged Eurocontrol to rationalise its frequency management systems, which are currently left in the hands of individual European states, leading to inefficiency, overlap and duplication.

IAOPA's point man on this project was Dr Michael Erb, managing director of AOPA Germany. He found that while Eurocontrol were



IAOPA Germany managing director Michael Erb (left) with AOPA Israel's Yaron Erfat

open to discussions about a clean-up of the existing system, the DFS reacted with suspicion – understandable, as IAOPA was effectively proposing the replacement of all German frequency control managers, and those of every other EU state, with two guys in Brussels.

Bizarrely, the DFS produced a study compiled by the Department of Music Informatics at the University of Mainz which showed that the existing frequency management system was not only efficient, but it could not possibly be improved upon.

Thankfully, Eurocontrol has given it short shrift. In November, Dr Erb received a letter from Eurocontrol to say it was setting up a working group with the US FAA to examine the whole subject of radio communication and to produce a co-ordinated strategy for the future. The letter added that in the meantime, a decision on 8.33 MHz spacing was to be deferred until the results of the working group's studies "have time to mature."

Dr Erb says: "It looks like we have met with the success we set out to achieve with regard to 8.33 MHz spacing. The DFS reacted with astonishment and has called IAOPA "stubborn and incorrigible". Two years ago we were alone in refusing to sign up to this unnecessary proposal, and in some meeting involving sports aviation federations, we were in a minority of 10 – 1 when votes were taken. They had all been convinced that 8.33 MHz was vital. But by our success, we have saved general aviation a massive and wholly unnecessary bill."

AOPA UK's chief executive Martin Robinson

says: "This is another example of how vital IAOPA is to all AOPA members, and in particular we owe a great debt to Dr Erb, who has worked tirelessly to kill this proposal.

"But this is also an illustration of another fact of life for AOPA – a lot of effort, ingenuity and money goes into simply maintaining the status quo. It's difficult to present the fact that nothing's going to happen as a hard-fought victory, but often, it is."

Things to come

AOPA UK's Martin Robinson, who as deputy vice president of IAOPA (Europe) is the primary interface between IAOPA, the EC, EASA and Eurocontrol, gave delegates a useful 'beginner's guide' to the coming European aviation structure.

"There's only one game in town," he said, "and that's DGTREN – the EC's Department of Transport and Energy. Through it, the EC is responsible for the development of the Single European Sky. They are guided by the Single Sky Committee, made up of representatives of member states including the UK's Department

for Transport. There is also an Industry Consultation Body which advises the Commission on Single Sky matters, and IAOPA is the sector representative of general aviation on the ICB.

"The EC has asked all other general aviation groups to work through IAOPA, and while some are reluctant, we have told all groups that we will work for them, even to the extent of taking representatives of those groups to meetings in Brussels, Strasbourg, or Cologne.

"Much of the Single European Sky legislation came into effect last April, and despite the fact that the detail is far from complete, this legislation is already law in member states whose parliaments – like the UK's – have signed up to it. You can complain about this, but only to the European Commission or the European Court.

"IAOPA has responded on many facets of the Single Sky, including VFR navigation charges and certification of Air Navigation Service Providers. As a result, parts of the draft implementing rules for the Single Sky are being looked at again. We believe the ICB will become an effective body to which the Commission will look for advice and we intend to play an active role within this group." ■

Kiss of life for instrument training?

IAOPA's proposal for a PPL instrument rating that would boost safety by allowing more pilots to fly IFR has been endorsed by each of the individual AOPAs in Europe.

The plan envisages a two-tier IR, the second level of which would allow IFR in all classes of airspace below 10,000 feet. Modelled on the UK IMC rating, it would be slightly more difficult to get, and in some ways might usefully be equated with the FAA instrument rating on which countless American pilots fly on airways in European airspace.

AOPAs across Europe have had informal discussions with the GA industry in their countries and have found a high level of enthusiasm for a new rating. Dr Michael Erb, managing director of AOPA Germany, said flying schools in Germany believed the rating might revitalise

The day will come when they stop N-registered aircraft operating in Europe the way they do today

instrument training across Europe.

AOPA UK director Pam Campbell, who is formulating the framework of the proposed rating at the request of the JAA's Licensing Sectorial Team, says: "Only around one percent of European PPLs go on to get an IR, which is not surprising as it requires for them to give up perhaps six months of their lives to study, and most just don't have the time.

"Instead, they prefer to spend two or three weeks in the United States and pass a single exam to obtain an FAA IR, which gives them exactly the same privileges of a JAA IR if they're flying an N-registered aircraft on airways in Europe.

"Although enthusiasm for the IAOPA proposal is not universal, it is viewed with sympathy by some European regulators, partly because I believe that ultimately Europe wants N-registered aircraft out."

Martin Robinson added that there were some 1,000 N-registered aircraft operating from the UK, and the three main reasons were the less onerous IR, less stringent medical standards in some areas, and less pernicious



maintenance regulations for some aircraft.

"In the US, any aircraft that's been in the country for six months must go on the N register," he says. "Whether we like it or not, the day will come when they stop N-registered aircraft operating in Europe the way they do today, and this instrument rating will be essential to help plug the gap that will open up."