

Brussels, 22 September 2017

JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT on the REGULATION of REMOTE TOWER OPERATIONS

Technological advances now make it possible for aerodrome air traffic services to be provided from remote sites rather than from a conventional control tower on the aerodrome as they are currently.

To regulate the implementation of this new technology, the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has already delivered a guideline document with a limited scope: single remote tower for a single low-density airport. The process of widening the scope of this document is ongoing but EASA refuses to write anything else besides guidelines. The reality is that one Air Traffic Controller or Aerodrome Flight Information Service Officer could be responsible for servicing air traffic in several busy airports simultaneously in the near future with all of the safety implications that brings.

EASA is basing these guidelines on a system that they recognize themselves as being immature: the safety assessment of changes to the functional system. Instead of issuing binding Rules and Regulations for the safe implementation of this technology, EASA proposes that the air navigation service providers will be allowed to issue unconfirmed evidence that what they are doing is safe. The national aviation authorities would be in charge of approving these systems with limited expertise and non-existing regulatory framework in the matter.

There are commercial interests behind this new technology: system manufacturers are looking to sell their products and air navigation service providers are looking to cut costs, especially labour costs. Yet these are the bodies that the EU institutions listen to when it comes to writing the appropriate regulations to make sure that the flying public remain safe. The organisations representing ATM workers, ATCEUC and ETF, insist that existing competence requirements need to be adapted to accommodate this new technology to make sure that the operators are adequately trained and qualified: a rating endorsement for remote tower needs to be introduced.

Further stringent, impartial and inclusive studies need to be conducted before multiple airports under the control of one operator can be approved and the rules and regulations for this need to be set in stone, not just guidelines.

To date, trials run under the Single European Sky ATM Research Joint Undertaking umbrella proved that it is difficult and potentially unsafe to operate two movements (take-off and/or landing) on different airports at the same time, yet EASA simply isn't addressing the issue.

ATCEUC and ETF urge decision makers to act so that the regulatory approach to this new technology is more balanced especially for safety of the passengers and the population overflowed and not just the commercial interests of aviation lobby groups.