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ETF Position paper on FISOs

Introduction

In many European Member States, Flight Information Centres (FIC) are operated by dedicated Flight Information Service Officers (FISO). At the same time FISOs are also employed (as AFISOs) at Aerodrome Flight Information Service Units (AFIU) in several EU Countries. In some Members States these are ATCOs' tasks delegated to FISOs. It clearly explains the safety role played by FISOs in the Civil Aviation Safety Chain.

FISOs act as professionals and front line operators at the sharp end. Their work not only facilitates the safe operation of VFR flights, but also can have a safety impact on IFR flights, especially in terms of a decreased risk for airspace infringements. Specifically those operators, employed either at FICs or at AFIU, provide the alert service and the information service, to “guarantee self-separation” between IFR (including commercial flights) and VFR traffic.

More generally the FISOs operate to ensure the reliability and the safety of flight operations, the efficiency processes, managing unexpected situations within a complex operating and regulatory system.

They have to perform a series of tasks, requiring high levels of knowledge and expertise, combined with high levels of responsibility, not only with regard to safety, but also the high economic costs of aeronautical activities.

Furthermore FISOs, like air traffic controllers, are a group of workers who are accountable for providing a safe and reliable service, and are exposed to stress due to the nature of their duty.

However, due to lacking superordinate rules, no commonality exists in the various aspects of FISOs' activity across Europe.

Licensing

There is no licensing regulation by ICAO or EASA for FISOs. In some countries licensing is not even formally introduced at State's level.



President Lars Lindgren

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General Secretary Eduardo Chagas



In order to maintain a high uniform level of civil aviation safety in Europe, the establishment of Union-wide competence standards can reduce fragmentation in this field, making for more efficient organisation of work in the framework of growing regional collaboration between air navigation service providers. For these reasons the ETF promotes an EU-wide regulation on licensing of FISOs.

Training

Initial training and continuous training shall be required.

An appropriate amount of theoretical (classroom or equivalent) and practical (simulator and on-the-job) training in order to gain a FISO's license shall be prescribed.

The training programme shall take into account the complexity of the working conditions and shall ensure that FISOs are appropriately trained to fulfil their tasks.

Continuous training shall consist of theoretical and practical training. It shall include an appropriate amount of training for unusual and/or emergency situations.

Working conditions

National laws and Collective agreements shall prescribe various aspects of working conditions for FISOs, like break and duty roster regulations. National Trade Unions shall be consulted in establishment of such rules, where not already existing.

Legal framework

Currently, no uniformity exists in how FISOs work and how their work is justified. Some States stick to relevant ICAO rules written decades ago, while in other States the working procedures of FISOs have evolved with the increase of VFR traffic with FISOs using tools like surveillance equipment in order to provide advanced flight information service ("Some States are using or are planning to use an ATS surveillance system in the provision of AFIS"¹).

In some counties, FISOs even handle IFR traffic in uncontrolled airspace. This means FISOs are providing advanced flight information service appropriate to the increased VFR traffic and to the mix IFR/VFR traffic, but due to the missing legal frameworks it remains unclear who would be held accountable in cases of occurrences.

¹ AFIS Manual – EUROCONTROL Manual for Aerodrome Flight Information Service (AFIS): Appendix A paragraph 1.1.



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As well as advanced FIS, there is an urgent need to revise current superordinate regulations (ICAO Annexes and SARPs) and to adapt them to the increased traffic and to the working procedures, which have evolved over the decades and have proved appropriate.

At the moment the only recent reference document available is the AFIS Manual – a Eurocontrol Manual for Aerodrome Flight Information Service (AFIS).

Additionally, States shall prescribe which other requirements, like medical or language certification, are required.

Staffing of Flight Information Centres

We recognise it is a management decision whether Flight Information Centres are being staffed by ATCOs and/or FISOs.

However, we believe that it improves the quality of service where the flight information service is provided by dedicated staff.

The quality level of flight information service has evolved in many States and has reached an advanced level, thus facilitating safer operations of VFR flights and also bringing forward safe ATM operations.

Therefore, dedicated staff engaged in the provision of this service on a regular basis seems to be the most appropriate way to maintain or even further improve the high level of the service.

Conclusion

Due to the safety related activity performed daily by FISOs in Europe, the ETF calls the European Union, EASA and CANSO to define common standards at EU level through EASA rule making bodies, defining Common Core Content and a Training Plan, with a special focus on:

- Initial, unit and continuation training;
- Theoretical and practical training;
- Competence assessment;
- Human Factor (stress & fatigue management, rostering system, provisional inability...);
- Other requirements (for example medical and language certification);
- On the Job Training Instructors (OJTI)



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