

Note for the attention of Aircraft Operators and Air Traffic Services (ATS)

Subject: Adherence to Filed Flight Plans in European Airspace

In 2018, a total of 11 million flights have taken place throughout Europe, representing an increase of 3.7% compared to 2017. Similar growth is expected in the years ahead. Against this growth, Europe is now experiencing airspace capacity issues, which are causing a significant rise in en-route air traffic delays for civil operators and flight cancellations, especially during the summer peak period.

The EUROCONTROL Network Manager has already taken a certain number of actions in particular with ATS providers, which will start taking effect for the Summer 2019. While it is clear that the main purpose of airspace capacity restrictions is to protect safe provision of ATS, a successful and safe outcome of the measures strongly depends on the adherence to filed flight plans by ATS and by aircraft operators.

There can be a strong incentives for pilots to try to recover delays or save costs by choosing another route or lower/higher altitude. However, if too many flights do this, the entire network planning is at risk, thus resulting in further delays in the whole system including airports and potentially also in increased safety risks.

KEY POINT

It is important that aircraft operators and ATS adhere to filed flight plans unless there are safety reasons.

Some important considerations:

- The filed flight plan is accepted by the EUROCONTROL Network Manager based on the predicted trajectory which takes into account number of constraints, including safe airspace capacity along the route flown.
- There is no formal requirement in European airspace to adhere to filed flight plans and changes to the filed flight plan can be initiated by either the ATS unit or the pilot.
- Approved change to the flight plan is transposed to ATC clearance which is then reflected in the current flight plan.
- ***The change however does not take into account all effects and the possible constraints along the new trajectory and thus may cause sector overloads or other problems in subsequent sectors that are outside of visibility of both pilot and current ATC unit.***

- ***Adherence to the filed flight plan is of great importance to keep the existing European network system safe and predictable.***
- To better understand the importance of adherence to filed flight plans this summer, take a look at this Skybrary [Safety Promotion video](#) on the subject of Unexpected Traffic in the Sector.

RELEVANT REGULATORY REFERENCES

COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING [REGULATION \(EU\) No 923/2012](#) laying down the common rules of the air and operational provisions regarding services and procedures in air navigation, in particular¹:

- Article 2 Definitions:
 - (79) '**flight plan**' means specified information provided to air traffic services units, relative to an intended flight or portion of a flight of an aircraft
 - (73) '**filed flight plan (FPL)**' means the flight plan as filed with an ATS unit by the pilot or a designated representative, without any subsequent changes
 - (64) '**current flight plan (CPL)**' means the flight plan, including changes, if any, brought about by subsequent clearances
 - (109) '**repetitive flight plan**' means a flight plan related to a series of frequently recurring, regularly operated individual flights with identical basic features, submitted by an operator for retention and repetitive use by ATS units;
- ANNEX: Section 4
SERA.4015 **Changes to a flight plan**
- ANNEX: Section 8
SERA.8020 **Adherence to flight plan**

Article 6(5) of the COMMISSION [REGULATION \(EU\) No 255/2010](#) laying down common rules on air traffic flow management:

- Article 6(5):
General obligations of ATS units

¹ See also [EASA Easy Access Rules for Standardised European Rules of the Air \(SERA\)](#)