

ATC deviation issues in the Nicosia FIR



Figure 1: The Ercan Advisory Area and surrounding FIRs. The Ecan area is not recognised by ICAO and the Ankara and Nicosia ACCs remain the absolute control authorities in within the relevant FIR.

Background

Following the 1974 invasion of Cyprus by Turkey and the establishment of a separate Northern State on the island (though one not recognised by the United Nations), the Administration of Northern Cyprus established in 1977 the “Ercan Advisory Area” monitored by “Ercan Control” for air traffic control covering the northern part of the Nicosia FIR/UIR and parts of the south-western section of the Ankara FIR/UIR. The control of this area via Ercan is not recognised by ICAO. As far as ICAO is concerned the FIR boundaries are those between the Nicosia FIR, Ankara FIR and the surrounding FIRs. Due to continued political friction and contrary to the requirements of ICAO Annex 11 there is no direct contact between the Ercan Control, Ankara and Nicosia. As might be anticipated the situation has led to a number of incidents with the number of reported instances of failure to co-ordinate flight plans and comply with valid ATC instructions remaining significant (see Fig 2).

Nicosia ATC report that the figures so far for 2010 indicate no significant improvement and warn that the trend may be upwards when this year’s figures are collated. Nicosia ATC has identified the main causes for the deviations as Crew unfamiliarity with the procedures due to inadequate training or briefing and instruction confusion in a high workload environment. Nicosia ATC argue


Reports of failures to co-ordinate flight plans and deviations from ATC instructions by type and year.				
Type	Year			
	2009	2008	2007	2006
Deviations from published ATM procedures	458	497	443	396
Deviations from ATC clearance	100	49	32	55
Unauthorised penetration of airspace	390	450	429	373

Figure 2


that this assertion is borne out by the fact that none of the reported incidents involved crews from Turkish or Cypriot airlines who are, naturally, familiar and well versed in the procedures.


Recommendations


IFALPA has developed the following advice for pilots in an effort to improve flight safety in the northern part of the Nicosia FIR and the adjacent airspace.


 All Member Associations should inform their members as well as other national pilots by the most suitable means of the existing critical deficiencies, so that Flight Safety within the Northern portion of NICOSIA FIR and adjacent airspace can be assured.


Southbound Procedures

 While in Ankara FIR comply with control instructions issued by Ankara ACC (either directly or through any other station designated by Ankara, e.g. Ercan Control on 126.70 MHz) up to point VESAR (B545) or point TOMBI (VA16). Nicosia ACC requires that aircraft approaching Nicosia FIR/UIR from Ankara FIR make pre-entry contact **at least 10 minutes before the FIR boundary**. It is essential that crews comply with this requirement: only then will Nicosia ACC be in a position to assume control and provide appropriate traffic separation.


 Once contact is established and flight details including Flight Level (FL) information passed, avoid making requests to Ankara ACC for FL changes for the rest of the flight through Ankara FIR, unless climbing from or descending to aerodromes in the immediate vicinity of the FIR boundary. If for any reason, it becomes absolutely necessary to make such level changes after initial contact with Nicosia while still in Ankara FIR, it is important for safety reasons that Nicosia ACC be advised at once of the change.

 At VESAR or TOMBI, flights will come under the sole control of Nicosia. Accordingly, you should change to Nicosia ACC. Remember there are no formal transfer of control procedures between Ankara and Nicosia ACCs and no changeover instructions will be issued on crossing the FIR boundary,


 Once within the Nicosia FIR flights should ONLY accept control instructions issued by Nicosia ACC until hand over to the next ATC Unit or FIR/UIR. Any invitation to change to another station (e.g. Ercan control) should be politely acknowledged but disregarded. In case of insistence a check should be made with Nicosia ACC.

 For flights entering the Nicosia FIR from the north and continuing east to the Damascus FIR. On completion of ATC formalities with Nicosia ACC after entry into the FIR as well as the position reporting requirements for Damascus FIR, establish communications with Ercan Control and pass on relevant flight details. This should be regarded as a purely courtesy call - under NO circumstances should any ATC instruction be accepted from Ercan.


Northbound Procedures


 Due to lack of contact between the two centers, advance flight information can ONLY be provided to Ankara by relay. **Provide flight information at least 10 minutes prior to entering** Ankara FIR, to Ercan Control on 126.70 for relay to Ankara. Remember the Control authority of Nicosia ACC remains absolute up to the point of entry into Ankara FIR.

Eastbound / Westbound Procedures

 Eastbound aircraft entering Damascus FIR are required to establish contact with Damascus ACC 10 minutes before ETA at NIKAS. If for any reason this is not possible, aircraft must provide a position report to Latakia Radio, a relay station for Damascus ACC, at VESAR, ALSUS or BALMA for relay to Damascus.

Even if a position report and flight details have been communicated to Latakia Radio, two-way communications with Damascus ACC established as early as possible and before passing the Baniyas NDB. Nicosia ACC remains primary station for listening watch until NIKAS where you can expect to transfer to Damascus.

 Aircraft flying west from the Damascus FIR should establish contact with Nicosia at the FIR boundary (NIKAS) unless requested by Damascus ACC to call Nicosia earlier.

 Aircraft planning to continue into the Ankara FIR may make a courtesy call to Ercan to relay advance flight information to Ankara and this should be done **at least 10 minutes before crossing the Nicosia/Ankara FIR boundary**. Control authority remains with Nicosia ACC until the FIR boundary (VESAR). Further calls to Ercan may be made as requested but these should not be made at the expense of other communications.