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AEI Press Release:

European Aviation Maintenance Standards under threat

During the recent Aircraft Engineers International (AEI) Congress, which was held in London and hosted by the UK affiliate ALAE and following lively and heated debate, aircraft licensed maintenance engineers were able to draw conclusions as to the extremely important issues which were raised.

Present were representatives from both EASA and the EU Commission, who also took part in the debate and although they gave explanations as to some of the issues, a lot of open ones remained, especially as to the lack of enforcement powers.

Amongst many others, the issue of pilots of (not only European airlines) not reporting defects or malfunctions of the aircraft they operate, when they appear, but only when convenient. We believe that pilots not voluntary would jeopardize their live and that of the passengers but operators (economic) pressure is making them co-operate to do so. This being completely in violation of the official Aviation Regulations. Although this is of course always denied, we have challenged and substantiated it especially to various NAA's These facts can easily be verified by random checks of aircraft technical logs and indeed we have always wondered why it has not been done up to now.

Statistically the aircraft system defects that occur during or before flight should be randomly spread over all flights, outbound or inbound or en-route, early morning or last flight of the day. Any airline where the system defects are most often written after last flight of the day in the various technical logbook probably commit fraud.

The issue of providing evidence by engineers, was another matter which was discussed but unfortunately it became very clear that contrary to practices in other parts of the world such as the United States of America, no effective European confidentially reporting system exists and in fact licensed aircraft engineers are often reluctant to provide evidence as regards violations by the various airlines and /or maintenance organisations for fear of repercussions against them.

The so called voluntary reporting systems are sometimes filtered by the operator through which they have to be sent in and therefore these safety reports do not arrive at the National Authorities or in case when they arrive they are often ignored because NAA's would have to take serious steps when they found something, thus destroying the build relationship with the operator. Again we call upon the NAA inspection teams, "do not believe us" but simply check. A spot check by 1 persons, 1 afternoon per airline operator would not costs too much time as will reveal a quick indication of the problem where further

investigation could follow. The fortunately good airlines have nothing to fear, any others should. At this moment AEI has sent an official safety warning to all the European National Authorities as well as EASA (with a request to report back) and we have demanded they will perform a quick check the way we have proposed. We will seriously check which Authority will take up the challenge and those who continue to ignore reality. Depending on the results we will take appropriate steps toward those National Authorities, including the use of media to follow this up.

Also discussed were the (invisible and secret!) findings by the EASA European Aviation Safety Authorities audits with EASA as well as the EU Transport Committee representative. Although no figures or numbers were given at congress, neither insight in the actions resulting from those reports we felt too much is left open or delayed. After Congress it was made known to us from other sources that from the findings over 2006 more than 50% yet is solved but therefore close to halve the findings still remain open 9 months into 2007.

We have cases provided where 6 years after the initial safety case was brought up, the problem still is not solved and persons continue to use their license with more privileges than they should have regarding the received training. The involved NAA admitted that it is thought to be politically impossible to solve. That shows us enough of the lack of power or will to solve sensitive safety problems. Although we have demanded these reports (as being citizens of the EU) from the European Commission they are not accessible. We would like to have an overview (even any information and the number of open or closed ones would help) of those findings and more particular (information on amount of findings per country and what is still open and therefore remain a safety risk to European Citizens).

From several Accidents investigations the lack of oversight by authorities and the lack of power to act swiftly when serious findings are made (see the Helios accident report 2005 amongst others) showed the continued lack of oversight by authorities. To prove this we remind you that despite the many failings revealed in the reports the Helios operator continued for too long and only public pressure finally forced the authorities to withdraw the operators Certificate. For AEI it is not finished

We were also asked by the EU representative why we have never contacted the EU, since they never received any indication about the seriousness of the cases we brought forward, but we as AEI have written several letters during the last years requesting answers or action from the EU on several cases without ever being given any reply whatsoever, We as AEI felt completely ignored, in addition the EU only reacted to our second invitation to come to our congress when we added our latest press release to it, in which we publicly blamed the EU for failing to act. We admit the EU came well prepared but even though they blamed us for our blunt press release in the end we brought serious safety lapses to their attention that needs active follow up to prevent future accident or incidents. There remains an invitation to come to Brussels to further discuss what could be done and we will take that up.

Observations made so far by AEI Affiliated Organisations in almost all European countries are as follows:

1. Airline Pilots (unlicensed and unskilled in Aircraft Maintenance) illegally perform maintenance actions at outstations when the aircraft is grounded due to technical problems. This maintenance is then performed because the Airlines have not organised their own local maintenance assistance (or do not want to use them because that takes time and costs money) as required by the regulations. Decisions on whether the aircraft is "GO or No GO" to fly to home base are not based on a thorough investigation by locally available but not contacted Technical Staff but by remote decision from someone thousands of miles away back at home base. This often results in maintenance procedure's being performed by Pilot's not trained to interpret the outcome of these procedures. Since in many cases nothing is written in the logbook evidence can only be found by thorough research of the aircraft data recording equipment and that needs knowledge beyond the capabilities of most NAA staff.
2. Abuse of "Single Event Authorisations" set-up to prevent an aircraft being stranded at an unknown airport after an unforeseen diversion of the flight. This regulation intended to allow for a relaxation of the regulations in exceptional circumstances only has been extended to such an extent that airline operations are using this exemption on a daily

basis. This results in a lower "exceptional" standard being applied constantly. We have cases where more than 10000 reportable single events should have been made to the National Authorities and only a minor percentage is actually received by the authorities creating a false sense of having a proper operating system. We have done a survey throughout Europe officially requesting this (officially publicly available information) but so far only 6 European Authorities found it in their heart to send us the information. We are either ignored by the other Authorities or they don't know how to respond to such a request because they fail to control this legally obliged information.

3. Maintenance Part 66 licences conversion reports should have been made when all the European Authorities changed their (up to then national licensing system) into the EASA Part 66 system as of September 2003. Up to now almost 4 years further in the process still not much has been taken most Authorities. As you may have read in the text above, there are too many serious failings by the National Authorities and EASA to be left unsolved. Despite the powers of the EU transport commission they have not been able / capable to solve these.

AEI cannot force changes on its own; we need to engage the assistance of the flying public, the media and honest politicians to have any chance of countering this trend.

You may now understand why AEI has a legitimate growing concern about the level of safety in Europe and so declared 2007 the year of the Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineer in order to promote awareness of the growing problem of commercialism over safety. AEI considers it their responsibility to inform the flying public about these safety issues, issues which both industry and governments continue to ignore.

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