

Expanding the use of Free Route Airspace in one of the most complex area of Europe

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From 8-9 December 2018 Free Route Airspace (FRA) was made available at weekends too in the airspace of EUROCONTROL's Maastricht Upper Area Control Centre (MUAC).

After successfully handling user-preferred trajectories at night (23.00 – 05.00 UTC) in MUAC's area of responsibility - Belgium, north-west Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands above FL245 – for a year, FRA has now been extended to full weekends. Given the density and complexity of traffic over this central cross-border area, a gradual roll-out of the FRA concept was essential.

The first year of FRA during night-time, with moderate levels of traffic, gave a good opportunity for air traffic controllers and air traffic management (ATM) experts at MUAC to improve and adapt their procedures to the free route concept. Beside that, early adopters among the airlines were using the efficient routing possibilities of FRA on a nightly basis. Expanding FRA to the weekends will mean working with higher volumes and complexity of day-time traffic without active military zones.

The final phase will make Free Route Airspace available at all times throughout the week, and is planned to be implemented by spring 2020 at the latest.

Free Route Airspace eliminates the need to follow fixed ATS-routes and allows aircraft to fly more efficient trajectories between a pre-defined set of navigation points. Compared to previously available explicit direct routing options, Free Route Airspace further improves demand predictability and flight efficiency and helps increase flexibility with a view to balancing demand and capacity. FRA also brings significant benefits to the airlines as they are able to fly more optimum profiles, using less fuel, hence reducing aviation's environmental footprint.

To unlock the full benefits, aircraft need to access free routing along the full length of their flight path. Cross-border implementation, however, is challenging in the core area of Europe. Therefore, Functional Airspace Block Europe Central (FABEC) defines a stepped and gradual implementation approach, whereby FABEC area control centres (including MUAC), in cooperation with airlines and computerised flight planning service providers, develop and implement cross-border free route airspace based on a single common FABEC concept of operations, which complies with standards defined by the Network Manager.

Deutsche Flugsicherung (DFS) – also member of FABEC – started to offer Free Route Airspace at all times in north-eastern Germany and at night (22.30 – 04.00 UTC) in the central and southern German airspace controlled by DFS above FL 245 since March 2018.





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Note to Editors

About MUAC

Operated by EUROCONTROL on behalf of four States, EUROCONTROL MUAC provides control for the upper airspace (above 24,500 feet, i.e. approximately 7,500 metres) of Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and north-west Germany. The international area of responsibility it covers is a perfect example of the simplification and harmonisation of airspace in Europe. MUAC is a model for cross-border projects in the spirit of the Single European Sky. Close to 2 million flights pass through MUAC's area of responsibility each year, making it the third busiest air traffic control facility in Europe in terms of traffic volume. During the summer, peak days see more than 5,700 flights.

More information via the website: www.eurocontrol.int/muac

About FABEC

The airspace of the six FABEC States of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland is one of the busiest and most complex in the world. The majority of the major European airports, major civil airways and military training areas are located in this area. FABEC airspace covers 1.7 million km² and handles about 6 million flights per year – 55% of European air traffic.

www.fabec.eu