

Research Workshop

Predictability and Flexibility center stage for InterFAB workshop

Zagreb, 6 May 2024 – *The world is becoming more and more volatile leading to less accuracy of traffic forecasts and an increased need to plan carefully. InterFAB leaders joined forces to discuss challenges and alternatives for the way ahead.*

On the 18th/19th April, Croatia Control hosted this year's InterFAB workshop in Zagreb to discuss the key topics of Predictability and Flexibility. The conference was held in partnership with the University of Zagreb and the German Aviation Research Society (GARS).

Attendees for the event included a great cross section of about 130 participants from twenty-three countries with representation from universities, institutes, PRB, States, NSAs, airspace users, ANSPs, trade unions, and industry.

The workshop began with Director General Croatia Control Mario Kunovec-Varga, Director DGCA France Damien Cazé, Director DGCA Croatia Dinko Stančić, Director General EUROCONTROL Raúl Medina Caballero setting the stage for discussion of key topics impacting predictability and flexibility.

A series of panels followed bringing together industry experts from ANSPs, airports, airlines and industry bodies alongside research institutions who presented the economic perspective as a consideration. These panels discussed a balance between the cost implications of air traffic fluctuations on predictability and flexibility and the daily operations of organisations managing Europe's airspace.

The meeting ended with five key take-aways:

Functional Airspace Blocks (FABs) remain integral pillars of the Single European Sky. Functional Airspace Blocks serve as pivotal platforms for convening high-level stakeholders to find innovative ways to address immediate challenges and shape the vision of the European Single Sky into a tangible reality.

Air Traffic Management (ATM)/Communications, Navigation and Surveillance (CNS) performance should be measured by means of its contribution to GDP, how it fosters social cohesion, and its contribution to a sustainable planet. This should be seen in a holistic way as one of the elements of the whole value chain which includes airspace users and airports as partners.

Traffic predictions should be done in a very transparent way enabling the community to analyse the methodological implications of earlier forecasts and further improve them. Case studies show that re-routings lead to lower predictability.

Economic Regulation should consider interdependency of key performance areas. Current economic regulation gives very limited manoeuvring area for decision-makers while providing very limited incentives to improve. Regulation needs to allow buffers enabling ANSPs to manage the unexpected. This may lead to overall lower total economic costs.

Flexibility has a cost, as does lack of flexibility. Lessons learnt from other industries show that the cost of flexibility has a trade-off with its benefits. The costs and associated benefits vary depending on the organisation and whether analysed in the short or long term and could be reflected in an incentive regulation.

Predictability and flexibility can be dealt with both at the strategic and tactical level. A prerequisite is that all actors disclose all information. The earlier intentions are known the better the airspace can be managed. It could be shown that all interests could be combined at the strategic and tactical level leading to a considerable improvement for both airspace users and ANSPs as only minor adjustments are needed.

Last but not least, we need to recognise Matthias Wittome of FABEC for being instrumental in the leadership of the InterFAB workshops since their initial launch. The meeting in Zagreb was his last meeting in his current capacity. We would like to thank him for his ongoing contribution and wish him the best for the future!

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 major European airports, major civil airways and military training areas are located in this area. FABEC airspace covers 1.7 million km² and handles over 55% of European air traffic.

For more information, browse www.inter-fab.eu, www.fabec.eu or www.fab-ce.eu.