

Address of Sir John Allison to EHPU General Meeting
18 Feb 06

I am grateful for this opportunity to make a presentation to you on the work of Europe Air Sports. I shall, of course, try to put that work into the context of the concerns of hang glider and paraglider pilots

But first, by way of general introduction, I will start by reading the key passage from our Vision Statement. It says:

The overall objective of EAS is a long term continuity of sports and recreational aviation in Europe, with an appropriate amount of regulation and without additional unnecessary restrictions, to ensure flight safety, access to airspace, free movement, and efficient and cost-effective organisation for the operation.

Additionally, we established a guiding principle, as follows:

The guiding principle for the transfer of governance from national authorities to a European authority should be: "what is permitted and conducted safely today in individual countries, should continue to be permitted under the new regime".

I hope and believe that you will share these ideals.

As you know, huge changes are taking place in the way that aviation law is being made across Europe, and in the law itself. These changes potentially affect everyone who flies, and, indeed, some air enthusiasts who do not, such as aeromodellers. But it is fair to say that the changes pose more immediate concerns to some groups than to others, and, fortunately for you, hang gliding and paragliding is not currently under threat.

You are today exempt from European airworthiness and maintenance regulations, nor is there any present intention to bring your craft within those regulations

You do not need a licence to fly. I applaud this, believing that flying licences add little benefit to essentially recreational and sporting activities. I take as my role model the British Gliding Association, which has managed its own affairs for decades, has never issued licences, and has delivered an accident rate as good as, and often better than, comparable state-regulated activities. It has, incidentally, also managed to produce a significant number of World Champions as well.

[You might also be interested to know that the Royal Air Force, in which I served as a pilot, has never licensed its pilots. It's a pretty good Air Force, though.]

Your movement is responsible for its own standards of training and safety. It seems to me that the EHPU is taking all these responsibilities seriously and is acting effectively and responsibly.

All this means real freedom for the sport - and long may it continue!

I see it as a fundamental duty of Europe Air Sports to help ensure that these freedoms are preserved for you.

In this context it is worth pausing and reflecting on why your sport continues to be so blessed, when other activities are more heavily regulated.

The answer lies in large part with the matter of third party risk. The primary concern of the regulators and of politicians is – quite rightly – with public safety. Here you are in most respects “clean”. You pose little or no risk to members of the public on the ground. With one exception, which I will come to later, the only threat you pose is to your own safety – and that is nobody’s business but your own.

Thus you have nothing to fear from EASA. They have no present intention that I can see to take you out of Annex 2 or to in any way to limit or regulate your activities or use of airspace.

I will add briefly, on EASA, that Europe Air Sports is now getting to know them quite well. They certainly have no ill-will or bad intentions towards air sports, in my opinion. To the contrary, from my experience, they genuinely want to do what is good for air sports. Indeed, their Rulemaking Team is taking a quite liberal stance in their approach to licensing and operations - for example, regarding the creation of a Recreational Licence - and are also listening to advice on airworthiness and maintenance. I am therefore optimistic that the many negotiations we are undertaking on behalf of other sports will be fruitful.

I return now to the question of risk. The one area where it could be argued that Hang Gliding and Paragliding poses a risk to others is the risk to other airspace users (and not just recreational ones). Access to airspace is an issue of the most fundamental concern to all the air sports, including Hang Gliding and Paragliding. Here the aim of Europe Air Sports is to preserve the greatest possible volume of unregulated air space, and to ensure that as much as possible of airspace that is subject to some form of air traffic management, is still accessible by the recreational user.

So far, the line has been held on airspace access and charging, thanks, at least in part, to the inability of nations to agree on a common structure. The proposals for the Single European Sky would have (and ultimately still could) greatly reduced the volume of free airspace available for VFR flight. The key issue has been the attempt to agree upon a common FL ZULU, that is the flight level that will in future define the boundary between regulated and unregulated airspace. This matter has been deferred until 2010/2012 at the earliest. So we are all safe for now.

That is far more reassuring than the starting position, in which the concept was broadly towards maximisation of airspace requiring a mandatory air traffic service, with FL ZULU set as low as possible, the collateral effect of which would have been to stifle air sports activity.

One possible interpretation is that the States will conclude, failing to arrive at a compromise, that FL195 will be the dividing line for the foreseeable future.

That was a prediction of possible outcome that I made in a recent speech to the Dutch Aero Club. However, those looking warily at the SESAR Project (whose aim is the long-term modernisation of air traffic management across Europe) have since painted for me a gloomier view of the possible future. SESAR is to be Joint Undertaking (i.e. jointly financed) between Eurocontrol and industry, which means service providers, commercial air transport, airports and manufacturers. It is hard not to worry about this alliance between parties whose vested interests and ambitions are diametrically opposed to our own. Those stakeholders who pay for the project will be judged competent to decide the future. That is understandable in itself. Those who make the investment in research and development and, ultimately, deployment of new technologies will expect a return on their investment. But this means that, if drop our guard, we could come eventually to a position where the structure and use of airspace is decided by the very groups with whom we are competing for access to the lower airspace in particular, with the danger that access would only be granted if we pay, or under terms that are unacceptable to our sports. I do not say that this is the intention today, but, judging from the way that the project is being set up, the risk is very clear.

It is necessary for all users to share the sky equitably. For one group to invest in control technologies that another group neither wants nor needs and thereby claim ownership of the sky would be wrong.

Nobody owns the sky. The investors will own only the technology.

Nor should any group be allowed to steal the sky and sell it back to us. Ultimately, such questions are political. What kind of Europe do we want? One that is ruled by big business? Or one in which the freedom of the individual is valued and protected?

I intend to air these matters and others at a joint Recreational Flying Workshop we are holding with Eurocontrol on 27th October.

Depending on how things develop, it may be necessary in coming years for us to go political over airspace. This issue is one of those unifying factors for all air sports and recreational flying interests and there is strength in our numbers.

So, although we are safe today, this is an area where Europe Air Sports needs to work closely with the EHPU, as with all other groups, to represent our legitimate needs in a coordinated and fully effective way.

At this point I would like to mention the only other thing, along with access to airspace, that can absolutely ground the recreational pilot, and that is medical requirements. To my mind the idea that for solo flight in any form of glider a medical examination is needed has no rational basis. Moreover, it is impossible to perceive a safety case for medical requirements more demanding than for a driving licence for solo flight in any light aircraft, powered or otherwise. Recreational aviation has somehow become ensnared in this trap and I want to release it. I certainly want to keep your end of aviation completely free of medicals, as now.

I would like to conclude by saying a little more about the relationship between the EHPU and Europe Air Sports. You have been a great supporter of our work, and for that I and the Board of Europe Air Sports are most grateful. We particularly appreciated your contribution to the start up funding for the employment of a part-time Programme Manager. As you will almost certainly know, our first choice did not work out and time and money were lost. I regret that very much. We repaid your share of unspent funds to you after he left us. However, our next selection, Rudi Schuefrat is a success. He is dedicated and knowledgeable and works far, far beyond his contracted hours. You may ask why we need this help at all. Let me explain.

Representation is expensive and very time consuming. Europe Air Sports is recognised by EASA, and by Eurocontrol, as the authentic and authoritative voice of recreational and sporting aviation in Europe. Importantly, we are also accredited at the European Commission. We have seats in all the key working groups and committees, and I believe that our input is well respected, and, judging by results, is influential. That means a huge volume of information gathering and collating. It means endless meetings at various locations in Europe. As our officials come from various nations, that means foreign travel and hotel bills. Apart from the Programme Manager, and one other officer who receives a small honorarium, which in no way compensates for the effort that he puts in, the rest of us are volunteers. We give endless time and effort to this work. We travel by the cheapest means, stay in modest hotels and pay for our own meals. Our wives get angry with us for spending so much time on something

that they could not care less about. We take nothing from the organisation for ourselves. We simply cannot manage today's volume of work and meetings without some professional help. Moreover, that level of effort and expenditure will ratchet up if we have to become political lobbyists as well.

Europe Air Sports' annual subscription income is 130,000 Euros. We are representing over 600,000 aviators. That is less than the price of a cup of coffee per person represented.

We try very hard to give value for money. We need your support and not just for the money. The main reason for our credibility is that we can speak for all air sports. Working together brings political clout.

One thing you can be sure of – we will do our best for you, and for all of the recreational aviation community. We are doing this work, not for ourselves, but because we want all these marvellous air sports to be there for our children and grandchildren. We do not intend to fail them – or you.