Provision of Air Navigation

Currently each State has one major en-route service provider and in some cases smaller providers at some individual airports. Only certified providers can offer services in Europe. To be certified they need to fulfill precise criteria as regards their safety management, security, quality and general competence at their services. This is important for the safety and economic viability of service provision in Europe.

The service providers are increasingly integrating their operations as part of the co-operation in Functional Airspace Blocks (FABs), which were initiated, as part of SES I in 2004.

Efficient service provision also implies a strong central node to connect the national service providers and FABs into a coherent network. This node – the Network Manager – was created in 2008 as part of the SES II initiative. The Network Manager deals with central flow management, design of routes and co-ordination of scarce resources, such as radio frequencies.

Despite the considerable gains achieved during SES I and SES II, the system retains a number of inefficiencies in terms of cost- and flight efficiency as well as the capacity offered. SES2+ will speed up the current developments by various measures, including an institutional modernisation of these major players. The players will need to adopt a stronger customer focus and improve their mutual interaction to create a truly harmonised system in place of the current patchwork of national systems.

Functional Airspace Blocks - FABs

According to the FAB plans made in 2008, about half of the FABs should have been operational in the sense of optimising airspace and services by 2013. To speed up development a deadline for December 2012 was included in SES II in 2009. In reality, despite the firm legal deadline, the situation has not improved markedly and is in fact worse lagging behind even the 2008 plans.

Only one of the FABs is largely on track and none comply fully with the requirements. With SES 2+ the focus will be on FABs being tools for achievement of the performance targets.

Airspace design moves increasingly to the level of the Network Manager (i.e. level above FABs), whereas the FABs themselves should focus on finding the optimal alliances for each part of the services being provided.

National Supervisory Authorities (NSA) and ANSPs

Provision of safety and capacity of air traffic requires the maintenance of high levels for adherence to quality standards and common procedures. To ensure this, oversight of the participants is required. Oversight can only be efficient, where the authority overseeing providers is independent of them and when its actions cannot be interfered by external political, financial or hierarchical considerations. Decades of aviation experience have proven that there is a direct link between the independence of oversight and its quality.

To improve oversight and safety National Supervisory Authorities have to be fully independent from the Air Navigation Service Providers, which they are intended to oversee. Only a decade ago it was normal for service providers to oversee themselves and even today many authorities are under-resourced and dependent on the support of the entities they are supposed to oversee. The intention is to increase further the level of independence and keep NSAs from using ANSP personnel for oversight and performance target setting.

One way to achieve this without putting an additional burden on taxpayers is to develop closer relations between the NSAs. Co-operation and exchange of best practises through common forums under EASA auspices will be encouraged.