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Can the French find a way out of the EASA maze?
The French are looking at an initiative which could help general aviation avoid some of the damage caused by EASA's proposals on instrument flying and its attack on the N-register in Europe.



Before EASA takes over responsibility for flight crew licensing in April next year, France intends to have an ICAO-compliant, genuinely achievable PPL instrument rating. Holders will seek grandfather rights under EASA, and the French believe that if a handful of European countries adopt their IR, EASA might be persuaded that there's no point in persisting with its own destructive plans.

Emmanuel Davidson, Executive Vice President of AOPA France, outlined the plan to the 126th Regional Meeting of IAOPA Europe in Friedrichshafen in April.

The new IR enjoys active support at the very top of the DGAC, the French CAA. The practical will require a minimum of 45 hours' training, which is greater than the ICAO standard, but the major difference will be on theoretical knowledge. Instead of seven written exams covering a mass of arcane and often nonsensical questions on how many megaphones are required on a 747, or fire axes on an A340, or calculating the mach number of a PA-28, there will be a single exam with questions relevant to the pilot flying a single-engined aircraft.

"On the private side, the European Instrument Rating is totally out of reach of 99 percent of private pilots," **M Davidson** said. "EASA's Working Group FCL 008 was working at a snail's pace at building a new IR and got nowhere."

M Patrick Gandil, the Director of Civil Aviation at the DGAC, recognised that urgent action was required. "The JAA/EASA theoretical knowledge requirement, which calls for about a year of study, is the reason so many Europeans go to the United States for their instrument ratings and fly on the N-register in Europe."

Under the FAA, the practical flying standard is as high or higher, but the theory is sensible and commensurate. Thousands of FAA IR holders fly in Europe every day, and EASA admits there is no safety issue with the rating. DGAC Director Gandil is to travel to the USA next month to fly with Bruce Landsberg, Director of the AOPA Foundation, to see the FAA IR in action.

M Davidson said: "In the UK they have saved the IMC rating for those who already hold it by forcing EASA to accept that it cannot take away rights that pilots already have. Unlike the IMC rating, the French IR will be ICAO-compliant and will meet every international standard."

The DGAC is talking to other CAAs, who are looking at whether they can do this too. The DGAC is asking whether they will accept French pilots flying into their countries, and if so, why not adopt it? If five or six countries in Europe do so, we can ask EASA whether it's really necessary to continue with FCL.008's proposals – why not simply adopt what will already be in existence?"

EASA is beginning to accept that its politically-motivated assault on the N-register will cause far more damage than it originally thought. It had calculated that between 2,000 and 3,000 pilots would be hit, but now quotes a figure of 68,000. IAOPA believes the number to be even higher.

Dr Michael Erb, Managing Director of AOPA Germany, who was IAOPA's representative on FCL-008, reported that the holders of FAA Instrument Ratings would be forced by EASA to go back to flight school, no matter what standard they had attained, in order to have a check ride. They would also have to undertake the full theory course. "This is unacceptable for people who have held their ratings for decades, that they must disappear for weeks, months, do all this theory learning again," he said. "Even EASA accepts that the theoretical knowledge requirement for the IR is much too ambitious for private pilots. "We met with EASA's Director of Rulemaking Jules Kneepkens and came away believing that this was a fruitful meeting, but then we found out that EASA FCL has effectively gone to the European Parliament and nothing can be changed. There may be a solution, but there is a high risk that thousands of pilots will be stranded and it will be a shock for our industry, which is economically in a very bad state. There has never been a safety concern over this. We must allow people to continue to fly as before with their licences, and we need methods by which they can validate their licences and ratings without unnecessary burden."

IAOPA report

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