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General aviation in Russia— A position report

Leonid Koshelev, president, AOPA-Russia

There is both good news and bad news about the general aviation in Russia. The good news is that general aviation in Russia is definitely and steadily on the rise. An ever-growing number of general aviation airplanes and helicopters clock hours that can compare with some established general aviation entities on the world map. The bad news is that this growing activity happens without a healthy measure of state regulatory control. It leads to lower flight safety standards, a greater number of incidents, and disrupts development that could quadruple otherwise.

AOPA-Russia has been advocating general aviation development as an engine for economic growth in the country and nowadays as an effective remedy to the economic downturn that Russia has experienced along with the rest of the world. The imperfect (or entirely missing) legislation for general aviation has always been the stumbling block during the almost 20 years of the post-Soviet development.

Why is it so difficult to develop decent legislation for general aviation? Because it is the very bottom, the base of the legislative framework—this must be changed. But this sort of change could overthrow all the rest of desired legislation. These basics that modern Russia inherited from the Soviet times happen to be very different from the ICAO approach or American or European air law systems. Simple things that everybody takes for granted elsewhere, such as the civil aviation authority overseeing flight



AOPA-Russia President Leonid Koshelev

safety issues, regulations applied to both flight operations and to aircraft, separate rules for general aviation and commercial air transport, etc., receive amazingly different treatment in the Russian air law. This situation creates chaos and renders 15 years of the general aviation rule-making effort by the Russian authority and the legislators an embarrassment.

The International Council of Aircraft Owner and Pilot Associations represents the interests of more than 470,000 pilots and aircraft owners in 67 countries. Formed in 1962, IAOPA is dedicated to promoting the peaceful uses of general aviation and aerial work worldwide.



Not so long ago the proclaimed policy of the aviation authority was not to touch the basics and, despite the show provided for GA rulemaking, not to allow GA to enter its circle of responsibility. This was done simply to avoid trouble and to escape the all-embracing reform that would ruin the lives of the aerial bureaucracy. Now through leadership changes and constant reshuffling of the authority (there were five government agencies overseeing various parts of civil aviation, which are now attempting to re-merge!) this resistance seems to dwindle. Increasing unanimity advocating harmonizing our laws with the rest of the world would definitely make sense. As a result, the authority has set the basic revision of the air regulations as one of the priorities on its annual action plan for legislative initiative. It is discussing the possibility to use foreign experts with a good ICAO background and Russian language ability.

At long last we see a light at the end of the tunnel. Perhaps in two to three years time as a result of these revisionist initiatives the air law authority will be restructured to face the challenges of working with the general public and non-aviation companies (as opposed to highly structured air operating certificate holders), notably the GA community, and there will be increased safety and development that will propel the country into the ranks of prominent general aviation States. It's a dream that might come true; meanwhile there are aircraft to fly and pilots to train.

Practical flying

There is no or very little improvement regarding foreign aircraft flying in Russia. Although airspace is not classified in Russia, all airspace may be considered as ICAO Class C. Regular VFR does not exist; it is controlled VFR only at lower altitudes using air traffic control. High altitude airways are mostly NDB-based with just few VORs around the country. Flight levels are metric. VFR flight levels don't exist. For foreign-registered aircraft only so-called international (English-speaking) routes and airports are available. Any flight operation touching on domestic airways or non-international airports would require an escort navigator and extensive procedures to obtain permission from both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Air Navigation Authority (now merging with the Federal Agency for Aerial Transport). Avgas availability is a tremendous problem almost everywhere and so far no solution is visible.

The fleet

Total number of GA aircraft is estimated to be 3,000. This number would include aircraft not listed on the state register. The bulk of this fleet include aging Soviet era AN-2s, Yak-18Ts, and Yak-52s. Robinson R-44 helicopters are a popular choice with more than 150 imported during the last few years. Very light aircraft (VLA) are becoming more and more popular. Otherwise, Cessna, CZAW, Tecnam, Eurostar, and Piper aircraft are normally seen at Russian airports. The total number of light and very light aircraft on the state register is now more than 3,000, including an unknown number of VLAs operating without registration (it is obviously the result of the missing ICAO standard that no flights should be permitted without aircraft registration!). There are also an unknown number of gyroplanes, gliders, and paraplanes.

Prohibitive import taxes—20 percent customs duty, plus 18 percent VAT on the sum of aircraft price and the customs duty—make importing aircraft cost prohibitive. This year the customs duty was greatly reduced for airplanes weighing between 2 to 20 metric tonnes basic operational weight. This is a giant step forward on the road to establishing a decent general aviation community, but we certainly need to extend the duty-free range down to zero.

In the past few years it became possible to apply for a certificate of airworthiness for a non-type-certified aircraft. In the Russian regulatory jargon they are called single species aircraft (as the term experimental means something very different in the Russian Air Law, namely the third class of aviation beside state and civil aviation). The respective certification process is somewhat similar to the experimental category is the U.S. and the Permit to Fly in Europe, but the process of obtaining the certificate is extremely difficult and not popular the general aviation well-received by the general aviation community.

Equipment and training

There are currently no specific avionics requirements for items such as Mode S transponders or 8.33 MHz radios in Russia. But mandatory ADS-B based on VDL4 is under discussion. The direction of thought towards ADS-B may be correct, but mandating this standard would likely make Russia the sole State requiring this type of device, something we don't want.

Approximately 30 private authority certified flight training organizations and only one state-owned aviation college exist, survivors of the disintegration process of the Soviet system. Certificate and rating structures resemble ICAO Annex 1 standards. Medical certification standards are very strict. Certificate validation procedures are by approval of training organizations only although PPL; validation is simple, requiring just a Russian sky-talk proficiency test.

So much for the progress of the Russian general aviation. As usual there is not so much practical progress as there is hope for a better future. And we know this sentiment is shared by the international general aviation community.

Secretariat News

IAOPA 2010 World Assembly location set

IAOPA President Craig Fuller announced on 19 March that the 2010 IAOPA World Assembly will be hosted by AOPA-Israel and held in Tel Aviv during June of that year. AOPA-Israel Chairman Yaron Efrat welcomed the selection of Tel Aviv as the venue for the important World Assembly, noting, "We are confident that the IAOPA business program, combined with our interesting and exciting tourist and social events, will provide a successful and memorable World Assembly. See you all in Israel in 2010!"

Details of the Assembly will be released during the coming months and placed in the IAOPA eNews and Bulletin and online (www.iaopa.org).

IAOPA petitions for ICAO aircraft rescue and firefighting change

ICAO Annex 14 requires rescue and firefighting (RFF) services be provided at all aerodromes open to public use. However, RFF requirements create a significant burden for general aviation pilots and operators because of the aerodrome landing, parking, and handling fees levied on these operations to fund the aerodrome fire brigades.

Anecdotal evidence from IAOPA affiliates shows that the requirement has provided little benefit for general aviation personnel, primarily because the mass, takeoff and landing speeds, and fuel capacity of small general aviation aircraft are insufficient to yield the type of takeoff or landing accident that would require a aerodrome fire brigade.

This contention is supported by the fact that the most active general aviation States, Australia, Canada, and the United States and Canada, have either filed a complete or partial Annex 14 difference with ICAO on this issue, relieving those States of the responsibility to provide RFF services at general aviation aerodromes.

But passengers paying for commercial air transport services deserve a higher level of safety and care. Additionally, these operations normally involve larger, heavier, faster aircraft, which give rise to more severe crash consequences. Therefore, IAOPA recently petitioned ICAO to require RFF services be for commercial air transport operations only. The IAOPA Secretariat is working with ICAO Air Navigation Bureau on this issue.

ICAO considering data recorders for GA

The ICAO has required flight data recorders (FDR) and cockpit voice recorders (CVR) for large aircraft for some time. These “black boxes” have proved to be valuable tools in determining causes for a number of airline accidents. However, ICAO is now exploring the advisability of requiring these devices for all turbine-engine aeroplanes [turbojet and turboprop] of a maximum takeoff mass of 5,700 kg or less for which the individual certificate of airworthiness is first issued on or after 1 January 2016. Additionally, the proposal would require these devices for all aeroplanes of the stated class by 2018. Although these dates sound like a long way off they will be here sooner than any of us would like to think. Significantly, the number of small turbine-powered aeroplanes is growing rapidly, increasing the effect on a greater percentage of the general aviation fleet.

The IAOPA Secretariat is working to determine the impact of the proposal, assembling both cost and safety data to determine the cost versus benefit of such a requirement.

ICAO ANC develops new work system

The ICAO Air Navigation Commission (ANC) develops draft Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) relating to the safety, regularity, and efficiency of international air navigation for the consideration of the ICAO Council, the governing body of ICAO. The ANC is the principal venue for interaction among States and observers, such as IAOPA.

For a variety of reasons, among them economic ones, the ANC has for some time deliberated how to work more efficiently and effectively. Rather than debating technical matters solely in the Commission Chamber, the commissioners have decided to make more use of ad hoc working groups, working as a number of Champion Teams, each with a leader to coordinate a small group which focuses on an issue. These teams then prepare a report to be presented to the commission as a whole for debate and eventual ratification. This process has proven to be useful, even as the commission is learning to make these teams work, given the different history of the ANC.

The new process has the added advantage that observers, such as IAOPA, have an easier route for the introduction of their needs and desires as deliberations are carried out. The setting is less formal and more diverse discussions can be held. At this time IAOPA is participating in the ad hoc working group on flight recorders and cockpit voice recorders, requirements which may come into effect sometime after 2016 for certain types of GA aircraft.

As the ANC adapts to the increased use of the Champion Team concept, the observers will find themselves becoming more actively involved with debates previously only held in the chamber, with the attendant opportunity to ensure that considerations important to general aviation are presented.

Affiliate News

IAOPA-Europe leadership meets with IAOPA president

Martin Robinson, IAOPA-Europe senior vice president and Michael Erb, IAOPA-Europe deputy vice president, met with IAOPA President Craig Fuller at IAOPA headquarters in Frederick, Maryland, USA 12 and 13 March 2009 to discuss strategic directions for the European region and the region's closer alignment with worldwide general aviation. Specific issues discussed included: An increased presence for IAOPA within Europe to detect and react to the many initiatives initiated by European authorities and agencies; Closer contact among IAOPA Europe and other world regions; Better harmonization of European, ICAO, and U.S. aviation standards; Promoting the benefits and pleasures of GA to the public; Helping AOPA members through difficult economic times.



Martin Robinson, Craig Fuller, Michael Erb, and John Sheehan

AOPA-Portugal activities

Robin Andrade, president of AOPA-Portugal, reports that the organization has been active on a variety of issues, working with national and regional authorities.

AOPA-Portugal held their General Assembly on 28 February, where its directors were reelected, now comprising seven members: Robin de Andrade, president; Laureano Santos, vice president; Gonçalo Areia, secretary; Gualdino Louro, treasurer; Dario Artilheiro, Luis Silva, and Carlos Tomaz.

President Andrade reports that, "AOPA-Portugal has now been in existence for more than three years and the number of members is growing every year. Several Aero Clubs are also members. We are strengthening our regional ties, having recently signed a Protocol of Cooperation with AOPA-Spain. We have a civil aviation authority, which does not consider its job to promote aviation, notably doing nothing to protect approved aerodromes, when neighbors place 10-meter high towers at the runway threshold.

"Our organization are pressing hard to obtain a Unicom radio frequency, which can be used by all aircraft operating at non-controlled aerodromes; the safety gains for a common frequency are great. We been successful in influencing our meteo and navigation authorities in providing for weather self-briefing in the Internet, as well as our AIP in the Internet, both free of charge. Additionally, we have obtained concessions regarding maintenance and repair of airplanes, handling and slot services at major airports, and aircraft insurance policies. We are a small association but growing well. See our web site (www.aopa.pt)."

Membership

AOPA-U.K. provides fosters mentors

AOPA-U.K. notes that some 75 percent of private pilots fail to renew their licences after five years, and one cause is the perceived difficulty of moving from being a newly qualified, low-hours PPL to being a confident and capable flyer. Exemplifying the problem is the low-hour pilot who rarely ventures beyond the local area for fear of complex and unknown airspace, mistrusts his own ability to evaluate the weather, isn't very good on the radio, can't confidently operate all the kit in the aircraft or unravel the NOTAMs, or sticks to familiar territory for other reasons. For him or her flying will soon pall, and there is a high risk that they will be lost to general aviation.

AOPA-U.K. CEO Martin Robinson says, "The AOPA Members Working Group recognizes that the pilot's response is generally not to seek help, but to turn to other pursuits. Our Mentoring Scheme would put them in touch with more experienced pilots

on whom they can call informally for advice and assistance—a sort of 'buddy system,' which would give the uncertain pilot the confidence to tackle a flight they would not otherwise attempt. At its most basic, this might be a matter of being accompanied on a land-away by someone who's been there before. AOPA can act as a clearinghouse between pilots who need a comforting presence in the cockpit and more experienced pilots who are willing to help them. Formalizing this contact system makes it easier to ask for help." For more information, go online (aopa.co.uk).

COPA For Kids aviation program

The Canadian Owners and Pilots Association (COPA) has revived the COPA For Kids aviation program to introduce young people to aviation. The mission of the program is to provide a motivational aviation experience, focusing on a demonstration flight in an airplane. These flights are provided free of charge by pilots to any youth ages seven to 17.

The organization's national network of COPA Flights will provide with children their first experience of flight. For many COPA Flights (local chapters of the organization) flying young people has become a highlight of the summer season. Many young people who had an introduction to flying at an early age have gone on to get their pilot licences and are now flying young people themselves.

COPA President Kevin Psutka notes that, "COPA For Kids is an excellent means of introducing children to the joy of flying and assuring a future for general aviation within Canada."

The program is well structured and sponsored by the Traveler's, which provides insurance to COPA members. Promotional and instructional materials are available online (copaforkids.org).

Safety Corner

Safety quizzes

The AOPA Air Safety Foundation has devised a series of safety quizzes that will explore and expand your understanding of a variety of subjects to your flying safety. This series comprises more than 25 quick quizzes that will review and enhance your understanding of essential subjects such as emergency procedures, aircraft icing, collision avoidance, wake turbulence, and many more topics of critical interest to the concerned pilot. Each answer you choose is instantly scored, providing additional information to enhance your learning experience. And, only you will know your test score. Take five minutes to test and expand your knowledge of collision avoidance (and many more topics) online (www.aopa.org/asf/asfquiz).

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