

IBAC Technical Report Summary

Subject: Caribbean (CAR) and South America (SAM) PIRG
Meeting: 11th GREPECAS Meeting
IBAC File: PIRGs
Reported by: Adalberto Febeliano

Summary

The main objectives of the 11th GREPECAS meeting were to review the decisions taken at the subgroup level, to evaluate the impact of the Ministerial AVSEC Meeting and the AVSEC Panel on the regions and to discuss the implementation of RVSM. Among the issues discussed are of special interest the following:

- a) Introduction of RVSM and RNP/RNAV routes on wider areas to increase air space capacity and to offer better access to the desired flight levels;
- b) Installation, in Brazil, of the CAR/SAM Monitoring Agency (CARSAMMA), which will continuously assess the performance of RVSM-compliant aircraft in height-keeping and of RNP-certified aircraft in navigation performance;
- c) The strong opposition to the RVSM implementation, voiced by Colombia and, to a much lesser degree, by Argentina; and
- d) The possibility that some of the airports in the regions may need to have their runways shortened, to comply with the certification process that will force the creation of Runaway End Safety Areas.

Implications for Business Aviation

Although the vast majority of States present to the meeting were totally in favor of RVSM implementation, Colombia has strongly opposed that measure. Should they decide not to proceed with RVSM implementation, a safety jeopardy may be created in the region, due to the lack of harmonization with neighboring States.

The installation of CARSAMMA means that Brazil will maintain a database of height-keeping and navigation performance for the region's aircraft, and that it may request such information from similar Monitoring Agencies elsewhere.

GREPECAS has fostered the creation of the ALACPA, the Latin American and Caribbean Association of Airfield Pavements, which is expected to help States on the development of better maintenance programs for their runways.

Decisions Required

Recommendation 1: That the POC support the maintenance of IBAC as a GREPECAS observer and a Member of the Flight Safety Board.

Recommendation 2: That the POC, through the Member's International Operators Committees, assess the need for additional alternate airfields in the regions.

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Meeting: 11th GREPECAS Meeting

Place and Date: Manaus, 3rd to 7th of December, 2002

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1. Preface

Once again the author has at last relinquished to the ICAO idiom, full of acronyms and strange expressions. For those in need of assistance, please contact him at the address below or, alternatively, check the existing prior reports on GREPECAS 8 and 9 and RAN/CAR/SAM/3, which do contain several explanations on terms used herein.

2. Introduction

GREPECAS is the PIRG for both the CAR (Caribbean) and the SAM (South America) regions. It is assisted by the 2 Regional Offices ICAO has in those regions, in Mexico City (Mexico) and in Lima (Peru). Its President is Mr. José Pedro Sánchez Dañino, from the Mexican DGAC, and its Secretary is Mr. Raymond Ybarra, from ICAO's Mexico City Office.

As in other PIRGs, GREPECAS has a number of technical subgroups that are constantly evaluating the status of the air navigation in the regions, based either on reports and requests made by International Organizations, especially IATA, or on requests from ICAO Headquarters, for matters of systemic nature (such as new navigation technologies or security procedures, to name a few). The subgroups meet at least once between GREPECAS meetings, and prepare reports containing suggestions of diverse nature. These reports are sent to the GREPECAS plenary, where they are reviewed by all present States and, in most of the cases, endorsed by them for enforcement by the respective ICAO Regional Office or by ICAO's Secretariat.

It is always worthwhile to mention that only the States have executive power, i.e., both GREPECAS and the Regional Offices may present suggestions and/or push for the improvement of a situation, but the implementation of its solution must be carried out by a State, or by somebody who was duly authorized by it.

3. The Meeting

The largest GREPECAS meeting ever held, 106 Delegates from 19 Member States, 5 Contracting States, 1 Observer State and 8 International Observer Organizations have attended to the meeting, which main objective was to review the work produced by the subgroups.

The meeting was held at Manaus upon a request made by Brazil, with the intention to show to all Delegates the remarkable progress made in the region after the start-up of the SIVAM Project, whereby radars and VHF stations have been installed throughout the Amazon region, allowing near 100% coverage.

It must be recognized that after the restructuring of GREPECAS, with fewer technical subgroups, and the creation of procedures for approval of decisions using modern telecommunication facilities, there has been a marked increase in the productivity of the Group.

The meeting has reviewed the recommendations made by the ICAO Council on matters such as CNS/ATM Activities, Traffic Forecast and the Ministerial AVSEC Meeting. It followed with the analysis of the results of the AGA/AOP, AVSEC/COMM and ATM/CNS subgroups and, because there have been no meetings of the AIS/MET subgroup, immediately after there have been reviewed the activities of the Aviation Safety Board.

The last topics were more of administrative nature, and while the Terms of Reference and Work Programme of the Group were revised to give higher priority to the implementation phase, a review of the Outstanding Conclusions and Decisions has left several actions dating from very early meetings.

Brazil has taken the opportunity presented by the meeting to introduce a new organization of the airspace in the Amazon region, consequence of the recent installation of the new network of radars and communication facilities, and to obtain GREPECAS's approval to the indication of its own Monitoring Agency as the official CAR/SAM Monitoring Agency (CARSAMMA).

Uruguay, on the other hand, has requested that its status in the group be changed from Rotating Member to Permanent Member, which was duly approved by the plenary.

Last but not least Brig. Normando Araújo de Medeiros, former Brazilian representative within ICAO's Air Navigation Commission and presently working in the Brazilian CNS/ATM Commission, was elected as GREPECAS's First Vice-President, a position that has been vacant for some time.

4. Discussions

The most vivid discussions of the meeting were around the RVSM matter.

While Brazil has been "bulldozed" towards adopting the concept much earlier than the other States, due to the high traffic in the EUR/SAM corridor, where the use of RNP and RVSM has allowed a much smoother accommodation of the airlines' request for the use of more favorable flight levels, further research made by the Brazilian Authorities among the Brazilian airlines has indicated that they were pretty much in favor of the adoption of domestic RVSM.

With a large territory, a network of routes that includes several domestic flights of more than 2 hours, and airlines that operate fairly modern aircraft (with a few exceptions, it must be recalled), the benefits of using more adequate flight levels by far surpass the required investments in equipment conversion.

Although the Authorities are very much concerned with the impact of RVSM on the General Aviation fleet, ABAG's inputs that most of the operators will be forced to follow the US timeline for aircraft RVSM conversion, due to market reasons, has given them the assurance they needed to decide to aggressively follow the project.

Most of the South American, Central American and Caribbean States, from Cuba to Chile, from Peru to Jamaica, are strongly interested in pursuing the same goals.

Normally with small territories, where domestic flights rarely reach FL 290, they are generally concerned with better accommodating the international flights overflying their territories, making the life easier for their ATM structures.

Apparently this is not the case for Argentina and Colombia.

With the argument that "... RVSM is the solution for one of the very few problems our region doesn't have ...", Argentina's position was in favor of a phased-in implementation, starting with FL350 to FL410 and, only at a later stage, extending it to FL290 to FL350.

GREPECAS' Secretariat has pointed out that that solution was rejected in the US due to safety concerns, and that it would be advisable that all States in the region would follow a unique transition program, again for safety reasons.

Although Argentina hasn't changed their position, they neither have insisted heavily in this point. Some delegates pointed out that it was probably due to the fact that Argentina is an "end-of-lines" country, with very little overfly activity, and therefore it would not be difficult for them to design special non-RVSM routes for their domestic flights.

Colombia case was totally different.

They argue that only 31, from their 74 fleet of airliners, are RVSM-capable. They further argue that the mountainous terrain in the country may cause orographical effects that may influence the height-keeping capabilities of overflying aircraft, and that they have a significant domestic traffic flying at FL290 or above.

The plenary was skeptical about these arguments, and to some it looked as if Colombia was willing to leverage on their strategic geographical position to obtain advantages in other areas.

The final decision on the matter was postponed to GREPECAS 12, although all States have agreed on continuing their planning for full-RVSM implementation.

A similar discussion has happened around the establishment of the CAR and SAM regions Monitoring Agency.

The creation of Monitoring Agencies to monitor height-keeping performance of RVSM-approved aircraft and navigation performance of RNP-certified aircraft has been demanded by ICAO's Council, and Brazil had already offered, at last year's GREPECAS 10, to establish such Agency for the said regions.

At that point there have been no approval or denial from the Group, and Brazil continued with their plans.

At this meeting Brazil has proposed to have its Agency indicated as the official CARSAMMA (CAR/SAM Monitoring Agency), while Colombia has presented a working paper speaking about their very good ATM technical infrastructure and asking that a new organism they were proposing to create be indicated the official Monitoring Agency.

Isolated in their position, 8 States have expressed their interest that Brazil would be indicated, and Colombia was forced to accept the indication of Brazil as the official CARSAMMA.

There were two other subjects that have raised some debate: GREPCAS' structure to deal with security matters and airports certification.

As far as security is concerned, upon ICAO's Headquarters request GREPECAS has been asked to create a new subgroup, linked directly to GREPECAS' Secretariat, to deal with the matter. Since LACAC (the Latin American Civil Aviation Commission, a group formed by several States' Civil Aviation Authorities) already had a work group assigned to that subject, the LACAC representative has tried to argue that a new group was unnecessary. GREPECAS finally decided that the new AVSEC Group will indeed be created.

Regarding airport certification, the main issue was the need of Runaway End Safety Areas (RESA) for all airports. Brazil has tried to obtain support from the plenary to a request that the RESA requirements be applied only to newly built airports, since some of Brazil's existing ones don't have standard RESAs, what may force a runway length shrinkage in order to create appropriate areas, affecting aircraft payload. Again the Group has decided to adopt the standard wording provided by ICAO's Headquarters, although it may be changed in the future.

One last topic that needs to be mentioned is that, upon Conclusion 11/12, IATA is asked to prepare a list of en-route alternate aerodromes required for safe operation, indicating to what type of aircraft and city pair route such aerodrome is related. Since IATA was asked to provide that information, IBAC could very well do the same, if a new aerodrome is needed.

The Member Associations must, therefore, contact their Affiliates to assess if any of them has any specific need that, if corroborated by more than one operator, could be indicated to GREPECAS as IBAC's contribution.

5. Conclusions

GREPECAS productivity has increased dramatically since the first time that IBAC has been present, at GREPECAS 8 in 1998, as has the quality of the technical work done at subgroup level.

These facts suggest that IBAC should start considering consider sending Experts and/or Technical Representatives to some of the subgroup meetings in the future.

As Brazil seems to consolidate its leadership among the participant States, other interests surface, and the meetings may become more politically-oriented than in the past.

IBAC's presence for the 4th time in the plenary meeting, although not consecutive, continues to generate important dividends, and the relationship with relevant ICAO officers is clearly improving.

IBAC was not able to participate in this year's meeting of the Flight Safety Board, what must not happen again in GREPECAS 12, which is scheduled for February 2004, in Cuba.

6. Needed Actions

The POC must continue to support the position that IBAC be a Member of the CAR/SAM Flight Safety Board, and that IBAC be present in all venues of said Board. The POC must also continue to support the participation of IBAC in all GREPECAS plenary meetings.

The POC, possibly through the International Operators Committees of IBAC's Member Organizations, should assess if Business Aviation has any specific need in relation to alternate aerodromes in the CAR or SAM regions that may be conveyed to GREPECAS.

The POC should also start considering the possibility of sending an Expert or a Technical Representative to some of GREPECAS Subgroup Meetings, in order to evaluate how beneficial the participation in said meetings may be.

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