

ATC Deviation Issues in the Nicosia FIR

Note: This paper supersedes 11ATSBL01 of the same name.

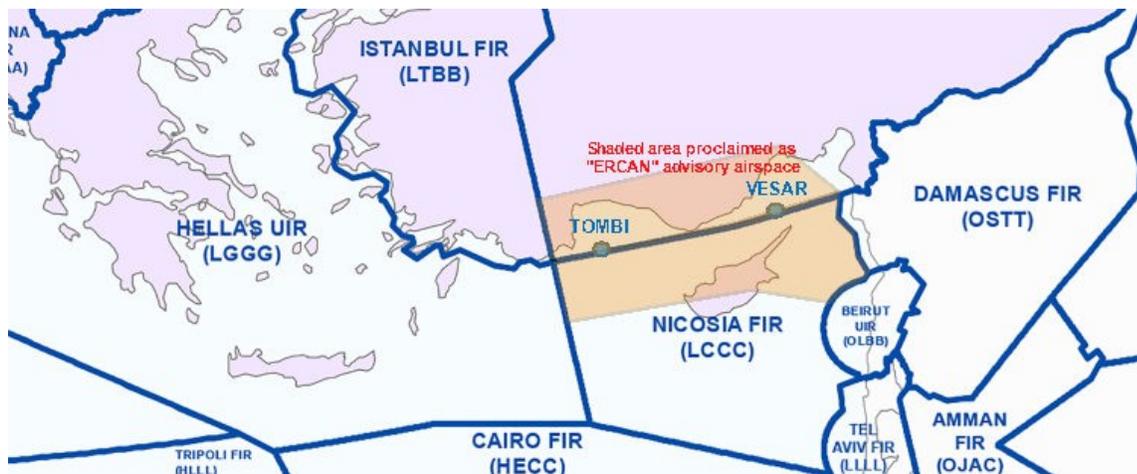


Figure 1: The “Ercan” Advisory Area and surrounding FIRs. The Ercan area is not recognized by ICAO and the Ankara and Nicosia ACCs remain the absolute control authorities in within the relevant FIR.

BACKGROUND

Following the 1974 invasion of Cyprus by Turkey, the administration in the occupied part of Cyprus (unrecognized by the United Nations) established, in 1977, the “Ercan Advisory Area” monitored by “Ercan” station. Its purpose was to seek to exercise air traffic control in the northern part of the Nicosia FIR/UIR and parts of the south- western section of the Ankara FIR/UIR.

Control of this area via “Ercan” station is not recognized by ICAO. As far as ICAO is concerned, the FIR boundaries are those between the Nicosia FIR, Ankara FIR, and the surrounding FIRs. There is no direct contact between the Ankara and Nicosia Control.

According to a recent study by EASA, operations in the northern part of the Nicosia FIR are subject to the hazards of conflicting air traffic control (ATC) instructions (interventions of “Ercan” station into the clearances of Nicosia ATC) in the same piece of airspace, uncoordinated transfer of traffic, and unknown military activity in proximity of

civil traffic. As the study indicates, the potential consequences could be detrimental to flight safety for aircraft operating in the above-mentioned region.

Reports of failures to co-ordinate flight plans and deviations from ATC instructions per year					
	FLIGHTS ENTERING		INCIDENTS		
	AT TOMBI	AT VESAR	AT TOMBI	AT VESAR	TOTAL
2016	52757	33679	180	96	276
2017	56989	34692	163	97	260
2018	75888	32132	182	72	254
2019	87691	30702	87	70	166

Note: Due to the covid pandemic, 2020 is not indicative and it has been omitted.

Figure 2

The situation has led to a number of incidents (see Figure 2). Nicosia ATC has identified the main causes for the deviations as unfamiliarity with the procedures due to inadequate training or briefing and instruction confusion in a high workload environment. Nicosia ATC argue that the reason for this assertion is the fact that none of the reported incidents involved airlines crews who frequently used the concerned airspace or who were well versed in the procedures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

IFALPA has developed the following advice for pilots to improve flight safety in the northern part of the Nicosia FIR and the adjacent airspace.

- To ensure Flight Safety within the northern area of NICOSIA FIR and adjacent airspace, all Member Associations should inform their members and other national pilots of the existing critical deficiencies, by the most suitable means.

Southbound procedures

- While in Ankara FIR, comply with control instructions issued by Ankara ACC (either directly or through any other station designated by Ankara, e.g., "Ercan" station on 126.70 MHZ) up to point VESAR (B545) or point TOMBI (VA16). Nicosia ACC requires that aircraft approaching Nicosia FIR/UIR from Ankara FIR make pre-entry contact **at least 10 minutes before the FIR boundary**. It is essential that crews comply with

this requirement: only then will Nicosia ACC be in a position to assume control and provide appropriate traffic separation.

- Once contact is established and flight details including Flight Level (FL) information passed, avoid making requests to Ankara ACC for FL changes for the rest of the flight through Ankara FIR, unless climbing from or descending to aerodromes in the immediate vicinity of the FIR boundary. If, for any reason, it becomes absolutely necessary to make such level changes after initial contact with Nicosia while still in Ankara FIR, it is important for safety reasons that Nicosia ACC be advised at once of the change.
- At VESAR or TOMBI, flights will come under the sole control of Nicosia. Accordingly, you should change to Nicosia ACC. Remember there are no formal transfer of control procedures between Ankara and Nicosia ACCs and no changeover instructions will be issued on crossing the FIR boundary.
- Once within the Nicosia FIR, flights should ONLY accept control instructions issued by Nicosia ACC until hand over to the next ATC Unit or FIR/UIR. Any invitation to change to another station (e.g., "Ercan" station) should be disregarded. In case of insistence, a check should be made with Nicosia ACC.
- For flights entering the Nicosia FIR from the north and continuing east to the Damascus FIR: On completion of ATC formalities with Nicosia ACC after entry into the FIR as well as the position reporting requirements for Damascus FIR, establish communications with "Ercan" station and pass on relevant flight details. This should be regarded as a purely courtesy call – under NO circumstances should any ATC instruction be accepted from "Ercan" station.

Northbound Procedures

- Due to lack of contact between the two centers, advance flight information can ONLY be provided to Ankara by relay. **Provide flight information at least 10 minutes prior to entering** Ankara FIR, to "Ercan" station on 126.70 for relay to Ankara. Remember the Control authority of Nicosia ACC remains absolute up to the point of entry into Ankara FIR.

Eastbound / Westbound Procedures

- Eastbound aircraft entering Damascus FIR are required to establish contact with Damascus ACC 10 minutes before ETA at NIKAS. If for any reason this is not possible, aircraft must provide a position report to Latakia Radio, a relay station

for Damascus ACC, at VESAR, ALSUS, or BALMA for relay to Damascus. Even if a position report and flight details have been communicated to Latakia Radio, two-way communications with Damascus ACC established as early as possible and before passing the Baniyas NDB. Nicosia ACC remains primary station for listening watch until NIKAS where you can expect to transfer to Damascus.

- Aircraft flying west from the Damascus FIR should establish contact with Nicosia at the FIR boundary (NIKAS) unless requested by Damascus ACC to call Nicosia earlier.
- Aircraft planning to continue into the Ankara FIR may make a courtesy call to "Ercan" station to relay advance flight information to Ankara and this should be done **at least 10 minutes before crossing the Nicosia/Ankara FIR boundary**. Control authority remains with Nicosia ACC until the FIR boundary (VESAR). Further calls to "Ercan" station may be made if requested, but never at the expense of other communications.