In this issue

Partners

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wirtualna linia lotnicza od 2006 roku.

Polish VACC

NOTAM
every game has the rules

There is no point in reminding the NOTAM's definition for the VP's readers. In the real world, it is the fundamental element of crews and airlines, that are obliged to consider them when planning all of the operations. How does it compare to the world of the virtual aviation?

There were a lot of discussions about NOTAMs' correlation between the real and the virtual worlds, some of them were more accurate, some were less. Hardly had the new Cracow-Balice EPKK scenery by Drzewiecki Design emerged when it turned out that the virtual NOTAMs are as important as the real ones. Let's set things up.

The legal body to exercise power over the Polish V-airspace is the PL-VACC. It is a well-organised, based on strict rules, organisation, led - at least in the essential part - transparently and its goal is not to pat on the shoulder and say "Oh, how wonderful it is you are here", but to keep our vFIR organised and coherent. Thus, there is no point in saying "maybe this, maybe that", but "if you want to fly - obey the regulations". And here is where the special, acting on behalf of PL-VACC, service comes up, working really hard, which can be noticed by anybody who reads NOTAMs. Of course, one can read it as "this is our wish" and assume bad intensions, but - as I suppose - it is not a very fortunate approach.

There are two airports in Poland, where - until the recent changes occured - situation differed a lot between the virtual and the real worlds. Let's assume that the one stand is either closed or open or there is something painted on the runway is nothing in comparison to one guy taxiing via the taxiway that officialy exists no more, because in the real world it would look as if shining, twinkling, 737 comes out of a... "scarecrow" bushes. In real aviation it is simple - there are conditions, even temporary, we have NOTAM - we can go, i. e. as it is in Cracow or Gdansk. A couple of things came out when talking on our Forum - some of the simmers either used modified AFCADs or edited them by themselves. In case of Gdanks, even, Drzewiecki Desing published an updated to the real airport taxiways layout. And what about that? Actually - nothing. Of course - we can even explain that friendly ATC cleared us to taxi via the non-existing taxiway, provided there was not so much traffic, but we can explain self-vectoring as well, as there was nobody in the range and the visibility was excellent.

Of course, in the real aviating there is nothing like UNICOM nor anything like "wild guessing". The fact that Kartuzy's VOR operation abilities are limited changes a lot, but nobody from PL--VACC was eager to introduce it on Vatsim. Why? For the sake of the pilots, of course. There were a lot of suggestions that every procedure can be executed without the KRT VOR, etc., etc. - but it is not essential. Similarily - just after the Drzewiecki Design's scenery came out, everybody's mouths dropped open, then there was a big confusion, because... the A1 taxiway got closed, now, that it exists at last! In Polish reality, it looked like complaints and biting remarks, as there was not enough understanding.
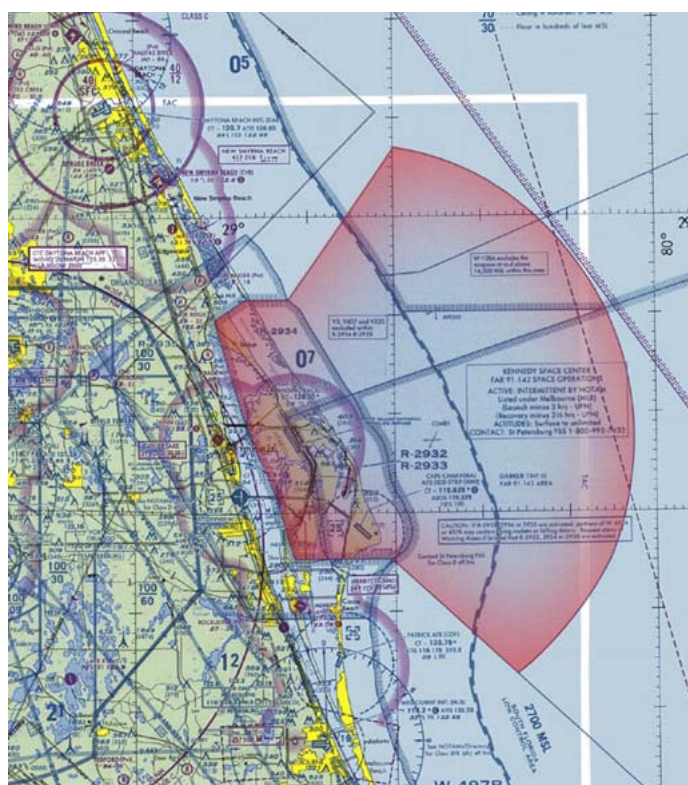
What we need NOTAMs for, then?

I am writing it from the ordinary, typical pilot's point of view - I have no idea of what is being said behind the scene, as most of us - I do not have to care whether the ATC has the sector updated or not, until I am under its care. In the case of UNICOM, when my safety is only my business, I would like to be sure that if I obey the well-known, published rules, I will not harm anybody or be taken as an ignorant. These NOTAMs are the guarantee of my safety and I, as the captain, may like them or not, but I am here to handle the aircraft, not to discuss their appropriateness. If the learned person (in case of the real world - more than one) published them, it is not pointless... It is even hard to believe that it is only one person in PL-VACC doing that.

To be honest, there is nobody who wants the new EPGD taxiways to be open as soon as possible more than me, the fact that in the real world they are being used, that they are available in the Internet, that we could... But, for God's sake, we all can either play on the same bases or have the level of the Polish children's sandbox, out of which somebody gets out offended every now and then. What is more, it is not fair to point all the mistakes without doing anything oneself.

Have I provoked anybody? Maybe somebody interested more than me would write here what is being said everywhere, where an ordinary Mr Smith has no access to? It is not a human factor that plays the main role here, but the rules, though. And the rules are irreplaceable if they are clear and respected by everybody.

You want to be a real airman? Respect the NOTAMs. It is my motto, what is yours? (AK)

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Respect Your VACC, you may have worse

All our controlled airports are among the 200 largest of Vatsim (with exception of Babimost but with Babice instead). Our virtual position is significantly better than in reality. This is a simple statistical effect as our virtual traffic is much closer to real data than in any other country. Why Poland is so exceptionally "trendy" at Vatsim? This is easy to check that our virtual traffic is mostly done by locals or Polish speaking virtual pilots. So do why we - the Poles - want to use Vatsim and our airspace relatively more often than any other nation? Let me present my point of view in this matter.

Simple explanation refers to the general popularity of virtual gaming in Poland. This is true - the Polish computer game market is much better developed than local purchase power indicates (plus there is additional huge „black" market on top). But if it were the only reason, if the Poles more than other nations sought only a place for virtual flying, why they do it at Vatsim, not at IVAO? Both networks are comparable, differing in total number of operations by continent. IVAO's divisions are our VACC counterparts. Both were created simultaneously. IVAO was recognized as more fun-oriented from its beginning with lower entry barriers. Nevertheless, the peak hours traffic over Poland at IVAO is comparable to our early morning silence. Pilots with Polish names are a little margin there, and the Polish Division at IVAO has never been seriously established, despite many attempts. Our overrepresentation at Vatsim is clearly not just about the "national" tendency to play virtually. Lack of competition from IVAO indicates that there is something in Polish vFIR at Vatsim that attracts us particularily.

In real life the competitive success is achieved through the quality i.e. by adapting activities to the requirements and expectations of the customers (clients in business, voters in politics, etc.). Better adjustment to the expectations and needs of customers than competitors do causes success. From such point of view, PL-VACC meets the requirements of Polish pilots much more than other VACCs do with their local pilots. Polish model does not necessarily work in other countries even though much of the PL-VACC activities are quite universal. But definitely it should work being applied at PL-IVAO division but none has tried to transfer it for over 10 years.

Since I can remember the main objective of the PL-VACC was to encourage virtual pilots to regularly use vFIR Warsaw. Sounds as truism, all want the same but PL-VACC clearly encouraged particularly to fly in the style of „as real it gets" and run its business really oriented to this purpose. Maps (handy made till 2004), cleverly applied NOTAMs, sceneries, AFCADs and tutorials and whatever-it-means-"as real as it gets" have been developed since the beginning. Time and efforts contributed were at least the same as for pure ATC duties, if not more. PL-VACC web page has often been often criticized, only by locals, though. Other VACCs regularly asked for the right to copy it. Controller trainings were oriented especially to handle pilots with „as real ..." verve - hence a lot of requirements at each stage of training and investment in training materials. The consistency of such approach was visible.

Even on Vatsim you may find web pages without maps or with outdated maps, without NOTAMs or with NOTAMs copied straight from the reality with little sense. Local language Pilot Schools and Checklists for Newbies are rare. Even links to sceneries are not common. There were VACCs almost exclusively oriented to controllers training - now show an impressive list of the staff but poor traffic. When you find such places compare distribution of traffic between Vatsim and IVAO just for interesting experience.

The story of animation of PL-IVAO division tells us about creation of something completely opposite to the PL-VACC. There were colleagues who understood the importance of a stable customer base for long-term traffic creation, even they headed the divisions (there is no election at IVAO, they were nominated) but were marginalized. Absolute majority always expected the division to allow for quick and easy career for controllers without the „requirements of PL-VACC" (it was local mantra). The command post has always been kept by colleagues who have not completed a training at PL-VACC for different reasons. The only attempt to create a sensible training system ended in a rebellion - the majority escaped to exotic network (and survived there for 2 months only). No training materials were edited in Polish – simply no one was willing to do so (although there was a queue to the position responsible for such edition). Website launched in 2004 was pretty good but died after a few months when it became obvious that it had been copied & pasted from PL-VACC pages and part of materials had to be deleted. It included the NOTAMs that later were never issued in a sensible way. Pretty good but simplified PL-IVAO pages were run by a colleague from Wroclaw from 2007 but IVAO HQ decided to centralize it and launched its own new pages dedicated for Poland with funny stories like quadrantal rule for Poland (pages do not exist anymore but there are witnesses!). Even unique to the IVAO - the navigation database was not sensibly modified – you may find even today jokes like position „Okecie Departure" – simply no one took care about information provided to the pilots.

Creating something completely opposite to the actions PL-VACC had just come to such an end. Well, virtual pilots interested in fun only are bored quickly at both – IVAO and Vatsim. The virtual ATCs promoted to serve "fun-lovers" only quickly fall in frustration observing empty radar scopes. IVAO bosses understood the problem and desperately dropped a young Dutch "paratrooper" in 2008 to head the division. He had to loose without ability to speak polish and without even basic knowledge of polish airspace (he was unable to understand the split of space between controlled and uncontrolled at his own exam). IVAO HQ finally closed PL-IVAO and such status remains up to now.

Our statistical overrepresentation on Vatsim is the effect of many years of consistent implementation of a concept for VACC. A perfect adaptation of this idea to the expectations of majority of Polish virtual pilots provides no local competition from IVAO. Opposite ideas failed. I do not know whether this model is universal so much so can be implemented to another location at Vatsim. Obviously, this model succeeded in Poland. Therefore refer to the title. (PK)

Flying is my job – interview with an airline pilot

Maciej Vozhny: Hello Torsten. You have asked me not to reveal what airline you work for. Can you tell us why?

Torsten: I am going to answer questions regarding procedures and work conditions in my airline and they don't really accept such "leaks". All I can say is, I work for one of the largest European operators.

MV: Okay, all's clear. Let's start from the beginning. How did you become an airline pilot?

T: I was a medical student when I read an advertisement that an airline was recruiting pilot wannabes. I applied without much optimism because there were plenty candidates. After a series of tests, examinations etc. they chose a group of six – including me.

We were then send to Florida , where we passed our private pilot licenses followed by CPL and IR. After our return to the airline, a training and ATPL examinations were carried out and we were then delegated to Paris, where I earned the certifications to be a Dash 8 first officer after another series of practical trainings and exams. I returned home and started working. With time I became a D-8 captain, I then moved to Fokker 100 and after a couple of years flying as a F/O I was advanced to the captain position. So that's briefly the story.

MV: How long have you been flying?

T: Excluding trainings, professionally as an airline pilot for 20 years.

MV: Can you tell us what your accumulated total flight time is and how your schedule looks in general?

T: My flight time is over 11 thousand hours. It's approximately 500 hours yearly. However, as I highly value family life, on my request I am employed at 80% of full-time. Thus I am entitled to 14 days off a month. As far as schedule is concerned – it often varies. Sometimes I fly one day and then I have 2 days off and sometimes I work 6 days in a row. There are days I'm assigned to one flight a day and there are those when I have to fly four legs. I am sometimes required to fly off-schedule because a pilot got sick. The schedule is established by the airline and I have no influence. In every case I am obliged to arrive minimum 70 minutes prior to planned take-off time.

MV: What routes do you fly? Do you sometimes visit Poland?

T: As you know, Fokker was not created having long-hauls in mind, so these are generally flights around Europe, northern Africa and western Asia. I am relatively often in Poland too. Mostly Warsaw and Krakow, but sometimes Poznan, Katowice and even Szczecin once.

MV: How would you asses our airports and ATC?

T: I think a major weak point of Polish airports is equipment. There's nowhere else I have to fly a non-precision approach so frequently. It is also probably Poland where I'm forced to divert to an alternate mostly because NDB minimums have not been met. Regarding the infrastructure, Warsaw and Krakow are the airports at a satisfactory, appropriate level. I recall when we've been on approach to Szczecin, I thought I got something mixed up and we were landing on an aero-club airfield. I don't want to offend anybody, though. It happened a couple of years ago

and certainly things must have changed for the better. Regarding ATC, it is safe to say that it is on a European level today, but a dozen years ago or so it was not so good.

MV: Where do you encounter the worst ATC?

T: Certainly Russia and Belarus. There are exceptions, but generally it is very bad, especially with regard to speaking English.

MV: We often hear that every pilot has a passion for flying. Is this true?

T: Flying is simply my job. I'm not a member of those who wouldn't be able to live without it. Commercial flying is terribly boring, but as we say in our environment: "as long as it's boring you know that you'll be coming home in one piece". Honestly, being an airline pilot is not only about flying. A flight from A to B is roughly 30% of the work done. More time is spent on briefing, filling out tons of papers, supervising that luggage boarding is being carried out properly, coordinating issues on cabin operation with the chief purser, fuel planning, walk-around inspections and so on.

MV: As we're talking about fuel – how do you correctly plan it?

T: The scheme is as follows (calculations according to appropriate tables):
- Fuel required for taxi,
- Enroute fuel to the planned destination airport,
- 30 minute holding reserve, taking into consideration that it is done at 1500 ft (so - high burn rates),
- Enroute fuel to the alternate,
- Technical reserve which assumes, that resulting from failures, APU will be used for the whole flight.

To this amount you have to add a 5% obligatory reserve. Besides, the captain has the right to request extra fuel and nobody can refuse them (so called "captain's reserve"). However, an obstacle arises here. A pilot refueling more than predicted by the calculations risks the airline being dissatisfied with them and this is later included in their "files". In such a case the airline is exposed to extra costs. For example, every extra ton of fuel in a Fokker 100 increases burn rates by approximately 2% because of the extra weight. There are also situations where you don't plan fuel, but fill up the tanks instead. It's the fuel price on each airport. For example, if we're flying to Libya where fuel is much cheaper, we take the required minimum and then refuel as much as we can in Libya.

MV: I have heard there are situations when you are not required to plan an alternate airport.

T: It's true, but very strict conditions have to be met. METAR and TAF has to predict very good meteorological conditions. Destination aerodrome has to have at least two runways operating. The airport's procedures have to allow for a circle-to-land approach. Moreover, fuel planning is done differently. Instead of a 30 minute holding, you plan for a 45 minute one.

MV: One of the question authors for this interview was interested in your situation regarding food and catering. Do airlines take care of their pilots in this matter or do you have to take sandwiches from home?

T: (laughs) I don't take any sandwiches nor a flask with me. But neither are we pampered in this matter. In flights lasting over

two hours passengers are entitled to a meal, in shorter flights a snack of some kind. Unfortunately, you may be surprised here, the crew is not entitled to such. But fortunately, many passengers give up their meals, so we don't fly hungry. It's the airline's obligation to provide us with a breakfast in case of a forced accommodation for the night. The rest is at our own expense.

MV: And now a bit more seriously. Have you ever reported a mayday?

T: No, never. Strangely enough, potentially the most dangerous situation happened during my training in Florida, while in the middle of a training flight one of the engines ceased to operate. At that time the instructor I was flying with declared an emergency. However, touch wood, during the twenty years of my professional flying I have never had any serious adventures.

MV: As far as minor failures are concerned, do they happen very often and what is their nature?

T: Of course failures do happen, but normally those are such trifles that have no impact on flight safety. A great majority of failures is discovered during preflight inspections and there's often a bunch of such issues. Approximately once in a month I enter a different plane than the one originally scheduled for the flight, just because technical problems have been discovered by the maintenance. As I recall, the most serious situation that occurred in-flight was a total failure of the autopilot. It happened ten minutes after take-off. Fokker is not equipped with fuel dumping system, so we were forced to hold for an hour and a half in order to land at our departure airport.

MV: When you are flying an approach in difficult weather, what is the situation regarding stress? Are you thinking about those folks in the passenger cabin and your responsibility for their safety?

T: There's a wrong philosophy of the whole problem included in your question. First of all, it doesn't matter how many passengers there are. So, there's no directly proportional involution of stress to the pax onboard figures. The self-preservation instinct joins in – ultimately, I want to live too and I am also onboard that aircraft. I'll express that this way. We decide to land when conditions and procedures permit. We are trained to land in various conditions. In regard to those "difficult" landings, I cannot be talking about stress. We are simply much more concentrated as a crew and that's it.

MV: Do you consider your occupation dangerous?

T: No. It's a completely normal job. Statistics speak for themselves. I risk far more when driving a car rather than flying. I'm probably in a higher risk group than a postal clerk, but working as a miner or a fireman etc. is certainly more dangerous.

MV: It is a well-known fact that almost every driver considers themselves a master a day after they received their license. How about pilots? Do all pilots think they are the aces?

T: It is hard for me to speak for the others. I am not a member of that group. I think that I am well prepared for my job, but I am also aware there are much better pilots in our airline.

MV: Many accidents are caused by improper crew resource management and crew coupling. The captain makes a mistake and the first officer is afraid to correct or reprimand them. How is this subject approached in your airline?

T: This is a crucial aspect of flight safety, and in our airline the crew selection is treated in a very serious manner. If I get to fly with a new first officer, I chat with them a lot before our flight. I will never enter an aircraft with an officer who is afraid of me. I often put it this way: "If you see me doing something wrong and you don't say a word - if we don't get killed, I'll kill you after landing" (laughs).

MV: And a question on our Vatsim community in the end. I know that you sporadically fly online. What are the biggest differences with real life?

T: First of all, you are in a much better position than airline pilots. You fly when you want, what you want and where you want, and this is freedom and passion and not a job, as in my case. In regard to the simulator alone, aircraft behavior with the autopilot engaged is represented pretty accurately. However, flying manually, by hand, is a totally different world. As far as communication is concerned, listening to you is like reading an ICAO manual. You speak to much! (laughs) In real life, we tend to shorten everything as much as we can. It is important for the both sides to well understand each other. You use too much salutations etc. But the most important thing here is your passion and commitment, and full respect. It is amazing what knowledge you are willing to acquire in order to accurately simulate the world of aviation. If we were to sit behind a bar drinking beer, and we started chatting exclusively about piloting techniques, procedures and so on, you would be able to hoax me for hours that you're a pilot, and I would most probably not catch up that a virtual one.

PLVACC
Short Summary – 2011

We probably don't have to convince anyone of the PL-Vacc activity success. It's enough to enter our website any evening to take a look at the traffic of planes and the ATC service. Something is still happening in the Polish virtual space. I've been watching our VACC for many years and I remember well the times when I couldn't notice any controllers at 8 pm. That's why, I don't need any numbers so as to know that we follow the right track. One can just see it! However, our virtual small world is becoming richer and richer in tools, including statistical ones, so it would be wrong not to prove it tangibly at last.

Rationally...

Let us begin with an easy part. A number analysis of the operations at the controlled airports by comparing year 2011 with 2010.

In fact, only three Polish aerodromes recorded a decrease in operations comparing with 2010. These are: EPKK, EPWR and EPPO. All others recorded more or less significant increase. This can be very easily explained. In 2011 traffic was distributed among airports for which new sceneries had been published. The greatest rates of increase were observed in Warsaw (+12% / +2168 operations), Katowice (+54% / +1833 op.), Szczecin (+68% / +579 op.) and quite surprisingly: Zielona Góra (+88% / +149 op. – the absolute number is not fantastic, but still it's a great increase as for the smallest controlled airport in FIR Warszawa).
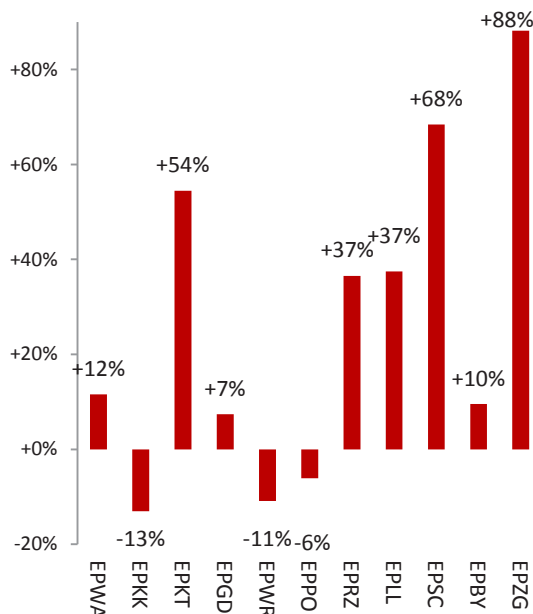

Fig. 2. Popularity of the airports

of the EPKT and EPGD shares. It is worth noting that EPKK & EPKT are serviced by one, common Approach position.

In the virtual FIR the amount of the ATC coverage is driven by the amount of traffic & vice versa. Therefore, as expected, a significant growth of the ATC coverage was recorded, as well. The following graph presents the rise of ATC coverage by types of the ATC position. (DEL is not included, as the value is not significant. Less than 50h in 2010 & 2011. Deliveries are used mostly during large events only.)

The total number of the ATC services in 2011 exceeded 9000 hours. As a result, Polish VACC placed itself once again in top 10 of all VATSIM "countries". We need to bear in mind that there is no point in competing for instance with the USA, Russia, the United Kingdom or Germany which outdo Poland in terms of demography or the amount of FIRs serviced.

If we compare real world aviation, where Poland is far behind Western countries (for example, PL is ranked 16th in the European Union by the number of air transport passengers [2010]), we can say with no doubt that our results are delightful.

Fig. 1. Changes in airport popularity

Fig. 3. Increase in ATC service time

Despite traffic decrease at 3 airports, the total balance for controlled airports is positive. It is a 10% growth compared with 2010. The absolute number is around 4500 of additional operations.

The traffic distribution among airports in 2011 is showed in the next (following) graph. There is a very significant expansion
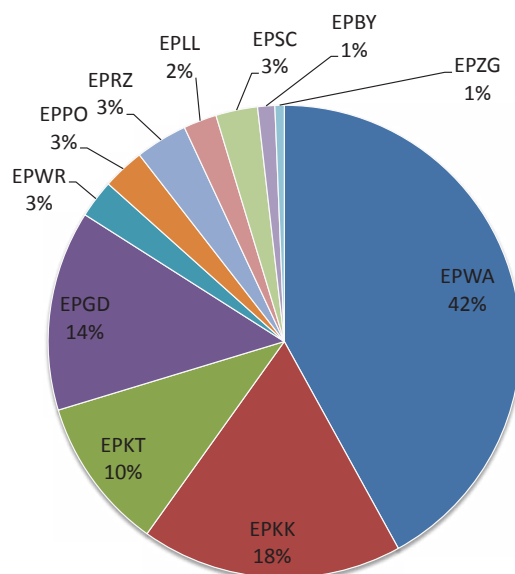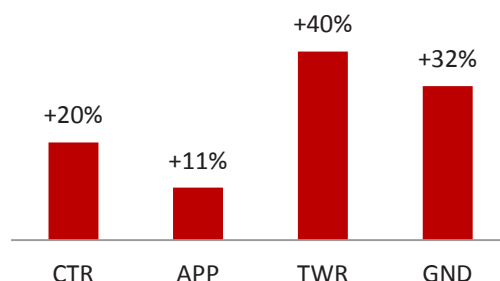
... irrationally...

Numbers are the unquestionable proof for our development. Thanks to them I can also go on to subjective observation with a clear conscience. Last year wasn't full of such a number of events to which e.g. Leszek Stanczykiewicz (functioning as an ACCPL4 from VII.2010 to II.2011) accustomed us, though, well

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warmed up VACC comes out well without regular events. Everyday ATC service as well as flights of the Polish pilots provide regular entertainment every evening. It's worth stressing that the Polish pilots are the spine of the air traffic. Foreign pilots constitute far less significant fraction of the end result. This feature has always been common for every country in the Vatsim Network. Of course, we deal with a variety of problems as every organization. Some of them(ironically) even result from excellent result seen in the statistic. Here's the example: a full radar ATC service makes some people unable to find a place for themselves in the evenings. Controllers, who aren't able to plan in advance by means of booking, are often forced to serve those less attractive in terms of traffic. This is such an unfortunate scale effect! The best remedy (in my opinion) would be services and flights promotion to regional airports with a procedural service control. Unfortunately, besides events the controllers are often bored there and the pilots don't fly due to the lack of service. The circle closes and there is a great fun from such flying.

Further activity

A term of office of the Polish VACC Director lasts one year and it appears that it always falls somewhere around June. As far as such configuration is considered, it's hard to plan annually from January to December. Similarly, it's difficult to summarize one's own or the whole Management Board's in such a way.

From the VACC's management point of view, the most important is to provide the continuity of activity. I think about e.g. the ATC training system as well as provision of the up-to-date details on space (maps, NOTAMs, ATC sectors, scenery collection, meteo details and the like). A precise duty list that has to be realized by VACC, can be found in the VATEUD regulations. The abovemetioned tasks have been performed excellently. Pro-

viding the basics mentioned is a main objective for every next term of office. The other areas can be considered to be realized extra. When one has additional resources such as people, technology, ideas, time.

Virtual airlines are well organized structures working in Poland besides VACC. They function in a similar way to associations. They gather a group of people around a particular thematic area and an expected information and experience exchange takes place among individuals in this group. VA performas one of a very important functions of raising the pilots' level in this manner.

My participation here is minimal, though, I can talk proudly about a co-participation of the Polish VA in creating and developing VACC (VACC seen as the whole Polish world of virtual aviation focused around VATSIM). Even this magazine, where I can write a few words from myself, is the best example of the grass-roots activity. Every airline cooperating with us cares about the development of its pilots in its own way. Us controllers appreciate it very much and as always ask for more...

Briefly speaking. My recipe for success is:
- provision of appropriate conditions for the grass-roots initiatives to be formed (building up a friendly atmosphere, counting on knowledge development),
- supporting initiative development by providing help that VACC is able to provide by means of its resources,
- solid performance of the VACC elementary duties!

Some more interesting stats comparing to 2010:
+12% of ATC bookings
+3.7% of ATC booking for training purposes
+18.7% of unique visitors at pl-vacc.org website
+16.6% of participation in forum discussions
+ we reached almost 1k fans of our Facebook page (MD)