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VOUS INFORME

Aix en Provence, le 25 avril 2016

Ça se passe en Europe, de nos jours.

La situation en Belgique est grave dans le monde du contrôle aérien.

Nos collègues ont été méprisés et jetés en pâture aux médias.

Nous les soutenons totalement en ces temps difficiles. Ci-joint des copies de courriers reçus.

Le premier est un courrier de la chef de la Guilde des contrôleurs belges, le second est le communiqué de presse de l'IFATCA et contient une analyse que nous partageons.

Dear colleagues, friends,

*As you probably heard via different channels (social media, press, etc...) things deteriorated here in Belgocontrol on Tuesday the 12th of April. In the following lines you will read what exactly happened in the past days, it was written by our **BGATC** president **Maryse Meulemans** who was personally attacked with a notice of default by our CEO:*

"These are very hard times for the Belgian controllers.

As I explained in Las Vegas (Ifatca congress), through the unions (BGATC is not recognized as a social partner) we have been in social conflict with our employer, Belgocontrol. Since February we opted for actions which would not hurt nor disturb the flying public, airlines, nor airports but which would put pressure on our management and politicians, refusing to attend training for reversal procedures in EBBR SIDs, a very political dossier.

Our issues: end of career, lack of staffing, work conditions (12 days in a row is more the rule than the exception), recruitment, technical reliability of our system (electrical failure of May, 27th and in the last 4 months, 3 major system crashes, last one April, 2nd)

After very mediocre attempts by management to come to a satisfying agreement for both parties, surprisingly, last Friday (8th of April) our CEO blew up negotiations himself, saying the atmosphere was not serene with guerrilla actions by ATCOs. We were ready to negotiate all evening, night and even weekend. Naively, we thought that he would try to get the file back to our minister of mobility.

But much to our surprise, he forced a unilateral agreement through with the support of the socialist union, which represents almost no controllers and got in return a pay rise for all non-controllers personnel.

We were flabbergasted! The agreement is completely opposite of our demands, raising our early retirement age to at least 58 but for some controllers up to 62. This coup was nicely orchestrated, 10 minutes after the vote, the news was announced on the intranet and journalists were already outside the gates.

Controllers arriving for afternoon shift got the news from some colleagues, most of them really shocked by the malicious way an agreement was signed and shoved down our throats. After some time, some of them realized they were too succumbed by emotions to handle traffic safely and called upon the unfit for service principle. Then the frenzy started, flow restrictions needed to be implemented. Management was waiting for this, the slaughtering in media started. Press releases must have been ready, probably for a spontaneous strike.

Actualité:

Maryse Meulemans a depuis mis en demeure Belgocontrol et son Directeur sur :

- le manque inacceptable de fiabilité du matériel et des logiciels.
- le manque structurel de personnel.
- la diffusion calomnieuse et erronée d'une action qualifiée de collective.
- Une méconnaissance de la responsabilité et la compétence de chaque ATCO d'évaluer en permanence sa capacité à assurer le service du contrôle.

They immediately stated that the Guild had been calling colleagues to call in sick, which is absolutely NOT true. I was at home already for more than a week with a heavy flu, from 16:00 I was flooded by phone calls from journalists.

This continued on Wednesday morning, much to my surprise I was then serviced by the CEO a notice of default for BGATC and me personally, as president. This notice of default states that they hold me personally responsible for all the damage done by our wildcat strike. This is outrageous! Neither me nor the Guild, nor any board member has instigated nor called upon controllers to call in sick or leave duty when not well. This was a very natural reaction of controllers to such ghastly news, concerning issues they have been fighting for over 2 years.

So we faced another day of controller bashing, constantly fueled by the Belgocontrol spokesperson.

The CEO has spent the day trying to force me to call the controllers not to fake illness anymore, which I refused. I am not going to incriminate myself for something I didn't do!

BGATC decided to call in the help of a lawyer. He suggested to counter attack, first deny all allegations and then serve Belgocontrol and its CEO a notice of default himself, for his failing leadership of the company, for letting us work with an unstable system, for forcing atcos to work too much, inducing fatigue and numerous burn-outs, etc. I also attack the way they have manipulated the media leading to excessive cancellations of flights, while enough atcos were present in the ops-room and towers.

I hope this helps you a bit more to understand what's been going on here in Brussels."

As you can read it's almost unbelievable that this is happening in the center of Europe. Unfortunately we had examples like this in Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Croatia, Poland, ... (sorry if I forgot to mention one). It's obvious it becomes a European trend. I can only remember such events in the 19th century during the industrial revolution in which the owner of the factory was overlooking his workers from his office, counting the money and where social protest was answered with resignation.

Like our Danish colleague said it's a consequence of SES mismanagement, imposing targets to the ASNP's requesting every Atco to be more performant leading to a non-existent social life.

We all need to realize that this will be hard to reverse unless we really stand united and develop a global strategy to counter European, national and local political decisions destroying the dignity of the profession of 'Air Traffic Controller'.

I hold my breath with the assignment in 2017 of the IPER (Independent Performance Economic Regulator) by the EC, a regulator that in worst case will have full power to impose targets, change reference periods, penalize the ones not reaching the targets,... .

POINTS CLES

1. Lors de négociations sur les effectifs, les retraites, le tour de service, le matériel, les pannes, le Directeur stoppe les débats, signe un accord à l'opposé des besoins avec des syndicats non-représentatifs des contrôleurs.
2. A cette annonce, certains contrôleurs, choqués et désorientés ont préféré stopper leur activité de contrôle, faute de pouvoir émotionnellement assurer un bon niveau de sécurité.
3. Le Directeur de Belgocontrol a accusé, à travers la chef de la Guilde des contrôleurs, l'ensemble de la profession de grève illégale et irresponsable en cette période de deuil et de risque d'attentat élevé.

I never thought, through my career as Atco, that I will be sitting on my desk a Saturday morning with a cup of coffee writing such a letter, knowing that I live in this little wealthy Central European country.

Thank you for all the support we already received, it's the only sunshine we get these days so we really really appreciate it. Feel free to answer the call of Cristian Radu to send the ATCEUC letter with your logo to the EC and the Belgian politicians.

A 'still' strong controller,

Mimoun Mokhtar

Executive Board ATCEUC

Liaison Officer ATCEUC/IFATCA/MARC-MOSAIC for BGATC

IFATCA PRESS RELEASE

16 APRIL 2016

The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations, IFATCA, is deeply concerned about the developments within Belgocontrol, the Belgian air traffic services provider, and the problems these have caused for the safe and efficient flow of air traffic in the region.

This conflict again highlights the shortcomings within the Belgian air traffic control system. In a letter to the Belgian government in 2009, IFATCA highlighted the unacceptable and potentially unsafe working conditions and lacking involvement of staff representatives. Despite continued promises made by management, no measurable improvements can be seen - on the contrary.

Air traffic controllers are faced with unworkable rosters to account for the long lasting lack of recruitment and training of personnel. In all likelihood, these practises violate European rules on air traffic controller working conditions and fatigue management. Controllers have to cope with incessant, politically-driven procedure changes and are frequently confronted with technical outages. Their pension age is now set to well exceed the accepted norm for controllers working high-density airspace. On top of this already almost unbearable pressure, a slanderous campaign was launched against highly skilled professionals without any respect or consideration for their continued commitment that has helped the Belgian aviation system survive crisis upon crisis.

Besides the local problems, there is also a European dimension to the conflict. Both in Belgium as elsewhere in Europe, air traffic control increasingly has to rely on the willingness of individuals to make the system work. If controllers, responsibly and in accordance with EU regulation, declare a 'provisional inability' to safely perform their duty, the system collapses, resulting in huge delays and painful situations for all involved stakeholders. Similar situations have been experienced in Spain, Poland, France and other European countries.

Under pressure from the European Commission to minimize costs, service providers have significantly reduced or stopped investing in their staff and in modernization of technical equipment. While this may save money in the short term, this shortsightedness will in the long run create major problems to maintain a safe and efficient Air Traffic Management system.

IFATCA calls upon all European governments and the Commission to finally understand that the current approach of the Single European Sky undertaking puts the entire system at risk. To consider only cost saving without regard to safety and human factors is having dramatic and possibly irreversible effects throughout our industry.

The modernization process of the Air Traffic Management system in Europe can only be achieved if the affected service providers and staff, in particular the air traffic controllers, are involved to find safe and sustainable solutions. Controllers are not part of the problem: they are an absolutely essential part of the solution!

POINTS CLES

1. A court terme la situation Belge est délétère, inacceptable et dangereuse.
2. Les tours de service, les pannes techniques, la fatigue sont insupportables à Belgocontrol.
3. Dans un cadre européen où la commission ne pense et n'agit que pour baisser les coûts, la démarche SES II met l'ensemble du système européen en péril, ainsi que la sécurité aérienne.
4. Les contrôleurs, leurs connaissances et leur capacité à s'investir ne sont pas le problème, ils sont au contraire la solution !

Conclusion:

Malheureusement nous pensons que ce n'est pas un phénomène isolé, mais qu'au contraire, cette conception du management au sens large est dangereux pour la sécurité des usagers du transport aérien.

Une croissance du trafic retrouvée et des outils à bout de souffle, les contrôleurs font tampon : toujours plus avec toujours moins.

Ne pas s'enquérir, à minima, de l'expertise des ICNA risque de conduire la NA au chaos. Il est encore temps de changer de CAP.