Documents, Concepts, Interoperability

Shaping the Future!

Since it was established in 2010, EATC has raised the level of interoperability in the air mobility domain. This is done through harmonisation of procedures and creation of common doctrines, as well as through joint multinational training. The overall aim is to enable the air forces of the member nations to better conduct joint and combined operations.

Interoperability is Key

Interoperability also is a key element for EATC to coordinate the smooth transition towards successful entry-into-service of the new common fleets like the A400M, C-130J and A330 MRTT. Procuring the same airframe does not necessarily mean that one can effortlessly exchange air/ground-crews or equipment nor spare parts. Or that one can operate under the same regulations and procedures. On the other hand, operating multinationally and being efficient in joint and combined operations is the ultimate benchmark today. However, speaking the same military language among partners remains a challenge and this is why EATC attaches a high priority in fostering interoperability, thus enhancing the ability to operate together and achieving the best utilisation of air mobility assets.

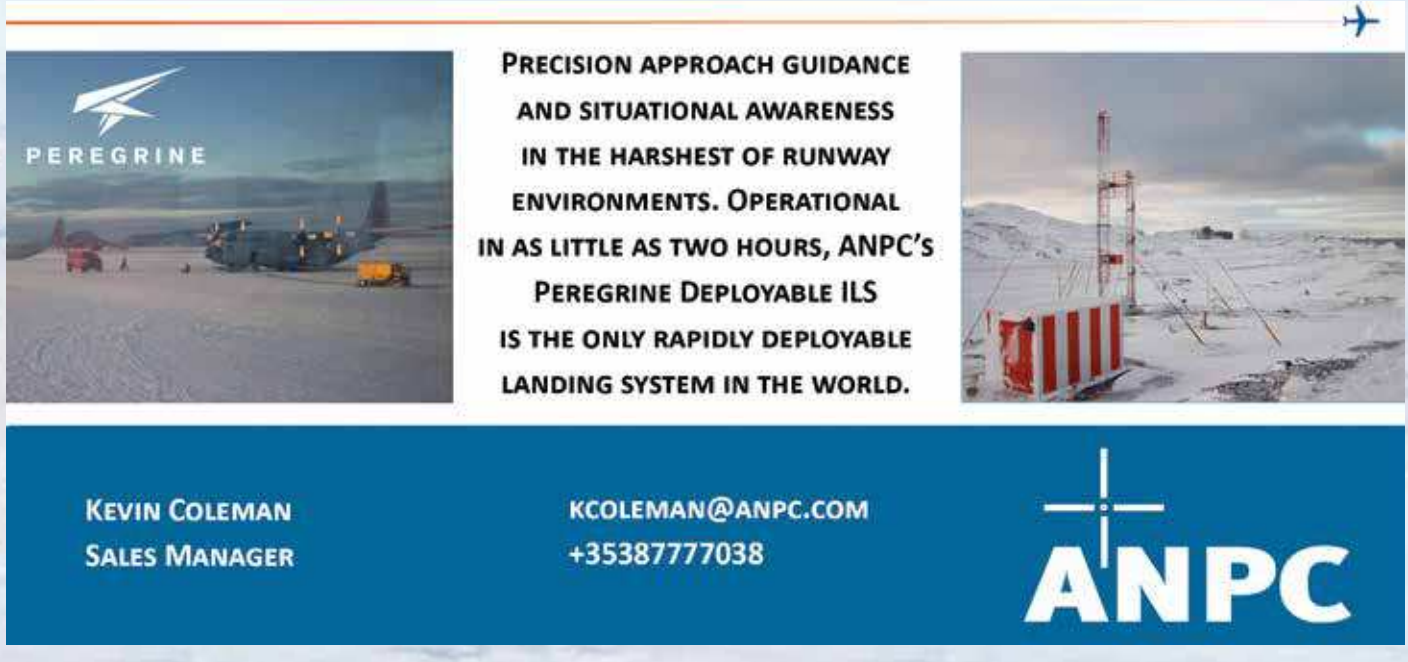
How to Pool and Share Personnel and Material in an Efficient Manner?

If someone asks EATC's Functional Division, there is one prevailing answer: more harmonisation leads to a higher level of interoperability. The Functional Division stands up for exactly this and is responsible to develop EATC's common doctrines and concepts, procedures and standards for all areas of air mobility. We work in the following three domains: the Employment Branch focuses on aeronautical operational aspects; the Technical and Logistics Branch concentrates on ground support aspects of air mobility operations; and the Training and Exercises Branch uses their results to develop training scenarios and prepare trainings and exercises.

Several studies and reports on 'lessons learned' show the importance of involving stakeholders during the whole product development to avoid complex and unsatisfying results. This is one of the reasons why EATC interlinked the functional and operational domains into its structure. The Operational Division commands and controls the member nations' transferred aircraft. The Functional Division translates the operational results into harmonisation of planning and usage of airlift capabilities, providing solution-oriented doctrines, leading multinational training events and ultimately offering imperatives for real-life operations.

A330 MMU air-to-air refuels German fighters. (Photo: MMU)

To understand the importance of harmonisation, a quick look into the composition of the EATC fleet will help. Each aircraft transferred to the EATC is legally still bonded to its national regulations. This regards crew rest, loading capability of an aircraft, night flying regulations and much more. Differing procedures could hamper the preparation and conduct of operations, and possibly result in inaccuracies during a flight operation, even jeopardising the flight safety. Common procedures should prevent this and are the prerequisite for applying the Pooling & Sharing principle and simplifying the tasking, planning and mission control of air transport operations.



French and German crews working together.
(Photo: EATC)

To achieve 100% of harmonisation still seems out of reach at the moment. However, focusing on reducing national regulations by transferring them into common manuals, paves the way for this development. One significant objective of the Functional Division, therefore, is to provide an EATC Operations Manual to the operators. The document is updated continuously in order, among others, to optimise standardisation and harmonisation among the member nations. This manual comprises several subparts, covering all the different aspects required for the safe, effective and efficient conduct of air transport operations. This includes, but is not limited to, regulations, training, qualifications, ground handling, risk management and tactical employment. Thus, the EATC Operations Manual forms the basis for day-to-day operations and deployments.

How to Develop and Improve Doctrines and Concepts?

This is done via a straightforward process flow in coordination with the member nations. The basis of any common output is a study under EATC lead. The steps to request, initiate, conduct and implement the results of a study are pre-set in a dynamic process. For example, a study can be initiated by one of our member nations or by EATC. The reasons can be manifold, such as national requirements or operational/functional needs. In any case, all our studies benefit our member nations. Once the study is initiated, EATC thoroughly investigates the outline and goals, as well as possible opportunities and risks. Eventually, after this assessment, the study is launched.

Let us have a look at the development of concepts where the cross-certification of A400M aircraft maintenance is a perfect example. This overall A400M project is a milestone in interoperability in the history of EATC and from the earliest stage of the development of the programme, a distinguished example of European cooperation. The study on cross-certification was initiated by EATC in cooperation with all A400M EATC user nations. In 2019, EATC launched the "EATC A400M Cross-Exchange of Technicians Manual". It enables nations to integrate technicians from foreign military Approved Maintenance Organisation to perform together maintenance on the same type of aircraft.[1]

The next step was made in 2020 when EATC established the EATC Cross-Maintenance Working Group. The objective is to develop a common concept to enable member nations to perform cross-maintenance on a standardised basis. In an initial phase the group focuses on the A400M, but will extend in the future its efforts to other aircraft types like C-130J and A330 MRTT. Cross-maintenance is a priority of the EATC Commander for the upcoming years. To Major-General Schick, it is essential to intensify the mutual acceptance between the nations on the maintenance and the aircrew side as cross-certification of national authority has the potential to be a significant force multiplier for air power.

Why is the EGOM a Significant Step to Foster EATC's Interoperability Efforts?

Because ground handling is an important part of an effective and efficient military air mobility. The EATC Ground Operations Manual (EGOM) was introduced in 2016 with the ultimate goal to ensure safe, efficient and consistent ground operations activities. The overall objective is that all users (executing agencies, load preparation units, handling personnel, crewmembers, passengers) work according the same rules with the same documents. This is why the EGOM offers common standards on passengers, baggage and cargo handling, but also on aircraft handling, airside security and load control. By applying the EGOM, a designated operating base of one nation can receive cargo or passengers from another nation, inspect and prepare these for air transport and subsequently load them onto any aircraft.

Since it was released five years ago, the EGOM proved successful far beyond EATC nations' borders, fostering a high level of interoperability