

FLYING

IN THE EU:



Que SERA,
Que SERA...

Why SERA?

To fly into other countries we need to understand the rules that apply there. As every pilot knows, to facilitate this, ICAO has harmonised the rules of the air globally through the well-known ICAO Annexes (e.g. 2, 11, 14) – or has it?

Before December 2014, flying in Europe class G airspace did not necessarily mean you could fly in without talking to someone. Sometimes a flight information service would actually issue clearances that you as a pilot were obliged to follow. There were potentially different equipage requirements for each class of airspace. Also if things became difficult, the interception signals shown by a military aircraft were not necessarily the ones you learned at home. A flight plan could start a search and rescue action – billed to you – even if the flight plan was not activated or the flight did not take place.

These and many more other national peculiarities were the reason why the Standardised European Rules of Air (SERA) were created and continue to be developed. The Member States realised that over the decades they had created so many national differences to the ICAO rules, that flying across the borders in Europe had once again become an exercise in law awareness, rather than an enjoyable pastime. A study conducted by the European Commission, Eurocontrol and EASA showed that there were over 1 700 differences filed against the ICAO rules of the air and comparable provisions and in some cases the original reasons for these differences had even been lost in history. In theory these differences should have been studied from the national AIP's before every international flight, but in practice no pilot could realistically be expected to know them all, when flying across several States.

It was time to bring some order into this mess to help the pilots and controllers. Several years of studies and negotiations resulted in the first part of the SERA rule, which erased some 760 national differences. This helps GA pilots especially to fly VFR abroad, without having to fear prosecution because of misunderstood rules, or in the worst case even causing accidents.

What is the current status among the Member States in a nutshell?

The first two parts of the SERA rule were published together in December 2012 and had to be implemented by all EU Member States at the latest by 4 December 2014. As EU Regulations are directly applicable, this means that all the corresponding old national provisions were automatically replaced with SERA. Most Member States have thus recently published new versions of their air laws and additional provisions and pilots are well advised to study the changes¹.

Can you now fly seamlessly across Europe?

It should also be noted, that although it is not possible for a Member State to legally differ from SERA, there are certain cases where the EU regulation allows them a choice of different solutions and for these cases national provisions are still needed. The SERA project is also still not complete and some additional elements should be agreed upon in 2015, for implementation in the next years.

- 1 To find the SERA text itself, go to <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/> and search for Regulation 923/2012. To find the non-binding support material (Acceptable Means of Compliance and Guidance Material) go to <http://easa.europa.eu/document-library/acceptable-means-of-compliance-and-guidance-materials/rules-air-amc-gm>

How does SERA simplify your flying?

Because SERA is almost 100% ICAO compliant², the changes brought about in your country depend on how close to ICAO your country was previously. To this point your national aviation authority was obliged to conduct safety assessment of SERA implementation plan. However here are some highlights from the GA pilot's angle:

Harmonisation of airspace classes: This is probably the biggest difference to the old. Previously there were over 20 national differences used in Europe. Now, regardless of where you fly, class C airspace is always class C in conformity with ICAO, class E is class E and so forth. This means that the entry conditions to these airspaces will always be the same, the equipage requirements will be transparent and the service received will always be the same regardless of which EU State you fly in.

Introduction of Radio and Transponder Mandatory Zones: In addition to the 7 ICAO conforming airspace classes, two additions were included after successful experience gained in some countries, to allow for additional flexibility, especially for small and medium sized airfields. These are the Radio Mandatory Zone (RMZ) and Transponder Mandatory Zone (TMZ), which can be used independent of each other and of the airspace class. The rule requires that it must always be clearly marked on the map whether a radio contact or transponder is required and even more importantly, this allows States to limit the size of controlled airspace as there are now less burdensome means of creating traffic awareness.

2 The list of EU commonly agreed differences could be found in the supplement to the Annex of Reg. (EU) 923/2012. There are 8 common differences to ICAO Annex 2 and 7 to ICAO Annex 11.

How does SERA simplify your flying?

Flight plan requirements: previously the flight plan requirements and systems varied greatly from State to State. Now they are largely harmonised so that especially the responsibilities when operating from and to uncontrolled fields are much clearer. It is also explicitly made possible to use air-filed (=radio) flight plans, abbreviated flight plans and to air-file a change from VFR rules to IFR operations, when the weather so dictates.

Facilitating IFR flights: Previously some States forbade IFR flights in uncontrolled airspace, subjected them to quasi air traffic control even when the weather became worse and made safe VFR flight questionable. SERA has erased these restrictions and allows for easier use of this safety-enhancing procedure.

Minimum altitudes: These are now harmonised and authorities are given guidance on approving exemptions to operate lower, for example when slope soaring or practising forced landings.



Are there any further future steps planned?

Much more so than before, but the work is far from over yet. EASA, Eurocontrol and European Commission continue to work on the third part of SERA, containing for example radio phraseology, and harmonising also several other rules in the coming year. However, already the initial SERA implementation was a major step forward in facilitating operations and whilst no-one likes changes, these changes are there to make life easier for pilots.



*Have a nice Flight
in a Standardised
Airspace!*

European Aviation Safety Agency
Ottoplatz, 1
D-50679 Cologne, Germany
easa.europa.eu/ga

An Agency of the European Union

