

ATC Change Over Nicosia FIR

The ICAO EUR/NAT Regional Office in Paris has issued notice of a proposed ATS change over the High Seas with regard to the intention of Cyprus to implement an aircraft holding pattern on a new waypoint within Nicosia FIR which is over international waters.

The reason for this is

- Closure of Tel Aviv Ben Gurion airport (LLBG) happens unexpectedly, on average every few weeks, mostly for security reasons
- The need to hold aircraft in the Nicosia FIR inbound to LLBG (most overflight traffic is routing around the Tel Aviv FIR)

Holding Fix	Airway	Description of the holding pattern	Inbound track	Upper/lower limit
PIKOG 32° 49' 31''N 33° 37' 29''E	UL609/UG18	Non-standard (left turns)	124° mag	FL350/FL130

The holding is situated approximately 130 NM south of Cyprus and 80 NM west of Tel Aviv (approximately half way between waypoints LEDRA and SOLIN), calculated with a bank angle of 25° and 90 seconds outbound timing.

Experience shows that the average time of holding until LLBG is reopened can be up to 20 minutes and the average amount of affected aircraft stays in single-digit numbers. An established holding pattern is considered to be favourable over the current practice to instruct aircraft to hold ad hoc at an advised location.

IFALPA is however concerned that aircraft at or close to their maximum level might not be safely operated with a 25° bank angle in the holding. Smaller bank angles would result in considerably larger holding areas. As this holding pattern is for aircraft inbound to LLBG the likelihood of the maximum FL being used is small.

For aircraft destined for LLBG it can be assumed that they would have sufficient manoeuvrability margin in the holding altitudes. Additionally, it can be expected that the aircraft in questions would not hold at the maximum altitude, but descend to lower levels already in the holding (current practice) in preparation for their continued flight to LLBG or an alternate. However, in rare cases, where there could still be a problem, pilots need to advise ATC when they need to use less than 25° bank angle in the holding. Lastly, pilots need to understand that this holding has been established to address unpredictable circumstances and that extra fuel should therefore be considered.

When the holding is published, IFALPA hopes that a chart will be provided so that it can be added to this Safety Bulletin.