

## Safety fears over Europe's busy skies

Level 2 | Intermediate

*Boom in budget flights means that system will soon be unable to cope.*

### 1 Key vocabulary

Match the words with the definitions:

1. budget airline
  2. congested
  3. to blame
  4. growth
  5. variable
  6. modest
  7. shortage
  8. under-staffed
- 
- a. another word for 'increase'
  - b. a company offering cheap flights
  - c. not having enough workers to do a job effectively
  - d. another word for 'crowded'
  - e. a lack of something you need or want
  - f. to say someone is responsible for an accident or a problem
  - g. not always of the same quality
  - h. fairly small

### 2 Scanning

Look in the text and find this information as quickly as possible:

1. When will Europe's skies become "full"?
2. How many people died in the crash over Lake Constance?
3. How many flights does Eurocontrol look after in a 24-hour period?
4. How many flights will there be in Europe each year by 2020?
5. What is the minimum height distance between aircraft?
6. How many aircraft are flying over Europe at any time of the day?
7. How many passengers are these aircraft carrying?
8. How many near-misses were there in April in Swiss airspace?

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The colourful budget aircraft flying over Europe are busier, cheaper and more numerous everyday. But they are creating a real problem for air traffic controllers as the skies become more and more crowded. If the present rate of growth continues, Europe's skies will become "full" in just over 10 years, and current systems will not be able to deal with the problem, according to Europe's top air traffic controller.

This warning will add to the concerns about the safety of Europe's congested skies. It came just a few days before the publication of an official report that will probably blame mistakes by air traffic control for one of the worst European air disasters - a mid-air crash over Lake Constance two years ago in which 71 people died.

National air traffic control centres in Europe are coordinated by a Brussels-based agency, Eurocontrol, which controls take-off and landing times in 33 countries from Ireland to Ukraine. Eurocontrol looks after 29,000 flights in a typical 24-hour period. Despite a decrease in air travel after September 11 2001, Eurocontrol predicts that annual traffic across Europe will double to 16m aircraft by 2020.

To deal with the huge increase in flights, the minimum height distance

between aircraft has been cut from 2,000ft to 1,000ft. Safety experts are now developing "self-separation" technology that will allow aircraft to set safe paths away from each other automatically.

At any time of the day there are 3,500 aircraft flying over Europe, carrying about 400,000 people. One in ten of these flights is operated by a budget airline. Experts are worried that a lot of the growth in budget flights will probably come from eastern Europe. Safety experts have warned that the quality of air traffic control in some countries is variable.

A large number of companies have entered the budget airlines market, including nine budget airlines in Germany alone. Next month a new Hungarian airline, Wizz, will start operating, offering flights from Luton in England to Budapest and to Katowice in Poland. While predictions are that annual growth in traffic will be a modest 3% in Britain and 2.9% in France, a huge increase in the number of services will increase flights over Ukraine by 7%, over Belarus by 5.5%, over Turkey by 5.9% and over Bulgaria by 5%.

Eurocontrol believes that six countries have safety management that is below "acceptable" levels, but it refuses to name them. Trade unions say that progress could be difficult because free movement of labour inside the enlarged EU allows experienced controllers to move west for better pay. Shane Enright, aviation secretary of the International Transport Workers' Federation, said: "There's a shortage of controllers

throughout Europe. There needs to be a harmonisation of pay and conditions, or controllers will simply leave the new member states."

Swiss air traffic control said last week that there were four near-misses in its airspace in April alone. A near-miss between an Iberia passenger plane and a business jet over Zurich could have been a disaster, according to a Swiss newspaper report. The Swiss, who handle an important corridor for aircraft passing over the heart of Europe, will be under further pressure this week. German investigators will publish the results of a two-year examination of the Lake Constance disaster, in which a DHL freight aircraft crashed into a charter flight packed with Russian schoolchildren.

The accident will probably be blamed on mistakes by Peter Nielsen, a controller working the night shift at an under-staffed Swiss control centre. Mr Nielsen was murdered in February by a Russian father who lost his wife and two children in the crash.

The Lake Constance crash was Europe's third fatal accident in three years caused by errors in air traffic control. It followed collisions on the ground at Paris's Charles de Gaulle airport in 2000 and Milan's Linate airfield in 2001. The accidents came after sixteen years without any deaths. Eurocontrol admits it is worried about the trend.

*The Guardian Weekly, Andrew Clark*

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### 3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. What was the probable cause of the crash over Lake Constance?
  - a. The crowded skies over Europe.
  - b. A mistake by the pilot.
  - c. A mistake by air traffic control.
2. Why are experts worried about budget flights from eastern European countries?
  - a. Because they are too cheap.
  - b. Because the quality of air traffic control in some countries is variable.
  - c. Because they are dangerous.
3. Why is the free movement of labour inside the enlarged EU a problem for air traffic control?
  - a. Because air traffic controllers might lose their jobs.
  - b. Because air traffic controllers might leave eastern Europe to work in western Europe.
  - c. Because there will be more accidents.
4. Why will Swiss air traffic controllers be under further pressure?
  - a. Because the report on the Lake Constance disaster will be published.
  - b. Because there were four near-misses in April alone.
  - c. Because they handle an important corridor for aircraft passing over the heart of Europe.

### 4 Vocabulary 1 - prepositions

Fill the gaps using an appropriate preposition. Check your answers in the text.

1. Europe's skies will become "full" \_\_\_\_\_ just over 10 years.
2. Today's systems will not be able to deal \_\_\_\_\_ the problem.
3. There are concerns \_\_\_\_\_ the safety of Europe's congested skies.
4. Eurocontrol looks \_\_\_\_\_ 29,000 flights a day.
5. Six countries have safety management \_\_\_\_\_ acceptable levels.
6. According \_\_\_\_\_ a Swiss newspaper report, ...
7. A freight aircraft crashed \_\_\_\_\_ a charter flight.
8. The accident will be blamed \_\_\_\_\_ mistakes made by the air traffic controller.

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### 5 Vocabulary 1 - word building

Complete the table.

|    | Verb    | Noun  |
|----|---------|-------|
| 1. | grow    | _____ |
| 2. | warn    | _____ |
| 3. | predict | _____ |
| 4. | fly     | _____ |
| 5. | manage  | _____ |
| 6. | publish | _____ |
| 7. | collide | _____ |
| 8. | develop | _____ |

### 6 Grammar focus - passive sentences

Look at these examples:

*A Russian father murdered Mr Nielsen.*

*A Brussels-based agency coordinates air traffic control centres.*

Now look at the way they are written in the text:

*Mr Nielsen was murdered by a Russian father.*

*Air traffic control centres are coordinated by a Brussels-based agency.*

Rewrite these sentences in the same way using an appropriate tense.

1. Safety experts are now developing "self-separation" technology.
2. German investigators will publish the report next week.
3. A budget airline operates one in ten of the daily flights over Europe.
4. The Brussels-based agency controls take-off and landing times.
5. The report will probably blame mistakes by air traffic control.
6. German investigators studied the causes of the accident.

### 7 Discussion

How can the problem of air traffic safety be solved?

Should airline tickets be more expensive to reduce the number of people travelling?