

World Air Games (WAG) in Dubai Air Navigation Race Championship (ANR)

Dubai / United Arab Emirates (UAE)

December 1st – December 13th , 2015

Liaison Officer Report – Heini Schawalder

History

After intense preparations the first meeting for the liaison officers was held in Dubai on November 27, 2014. All liaison officers as well as the Dubai organization responsible staff members attended the meeting.

I personally used the location to ask the most urgent and open questions:

- 1) Aircraft. What types and how many?
- 2) Where can we fly ANR? Free air spaces.
- 3) How many nations will be invited?
- 4) How many teams per nation?
- 5) Which experts GAC has to make available?
- 6) Validation Licences?
- 7) Which airport for ANR?
- 8) Airport VAC?
- 9) Alternate airfields?
- 10) Emergency organisation?
- 11) Electronic Maps 1:200'000?
- 12) Costs for software update?
- 13) And several questions more...

Dubai representatives were mainly avoiding answering any questions and instead tried to create an amicable atmosphere. They were downplaying all issues as there wouldn't be any problems which could not be solved and pretended everything could be arranged in a very simple manner.

A local visit to the intended competition sites was an imposition for ANR. They first want us to start from the harbor runway at Dubai skydive in Palmeira. With no taxiway available and a small apron for three twin Otters, as well having to serve a large number of other competitors this was definitely no option. From there we went into the desert to the skydive Dubai desert airfield. On my objection that not all disciplines would be able to work without a taxiway, other then maybe by reducing the number of disciplines altogether, the answer was: no problem at all, we will build you a taxiway from scratch! At this point in time we were still believing in all their nice promises.

Until November 2015 another three meetings were held in Dubai. All went along the same pattern: Lots of 'hot air' and no firm commitments.

Organizational activities prior to November 27, 2015

The catastrophic status of the situation around the local organization and setup started to show fully in June 2015. Maurice Ducret and myself had given ourselves clear targets on what had to be in place and by when. Here are just a couple of examples:

Map 1:200'000 and airspace for ANR.

First the good news : for many months we were promised: you will receive the maps in 2 weeks latest via e-mail. And now the bad news: those maps never arrived. None of our many interventions had any effect, other than the same empty promise: the maps will arrive in 2 weeks. The bottom line message for us was clear: these maps would never arrive. And no maps meant, no ANR competition.

In June 2015 Maurice and I decided to start arranging for a plan B, which meant to organize the maps from somewhere else. We finally found a way to get good quality maps through a German Cartographic company, providing a combination of Russian base maps, actual satellite photos and OpenStreetMap inputs with the correct relations.

At this point in time we held back informing our counterparts of our Plan B solution. This was we were sitting back looking with amazement with which strangest ideas the organizers were trying to hide their incompetence: once they claimed the military had put in their veto for distributing the maps, because of secret military information of sites involved in the area. As we mentioned that satellite technology is since long able to detect any ground structure the size of a 2 EURO piece, it quieted down the obstructions, bit with the same results: no maps. For a while the maps discussion went away, only to be replaced by a discussion about airspace restrictions. This time along the lines of you will only be allowed to fly Thursday's and Friday's due to military training flights on other days. No comment !

Finally we received several oral approvals to fly, which then only was cancelled only days later, every time. Finally, on November 27, we travelled to Dubai without having any airspace approvals, but with solid Russian maps in our luggage, as well as the complete set of ANR parcours laid out through our course setter in Switzerland, which all turned out to be a golden decision.

Validation of Licenses

Not unexpectedly, for the validation process for ANR participants' licenses, a similar mess was awaiting us. When putting pressure on the Dubai organizing team in July 2015 regarding the validation of the pilot licenses, we were astonished to learn from the FAI (Eric Bertin), that there would be no need for a validation, because the teams would be flying in a R Zone, plus there would be only a limited number of flights.

We sure did not accept this information, as this was clearly against international aviation laws, as well would bring up complications with insurers going after pilots directly in case of an incident.

I personally intervened with the Director of the Dubai Civil Aviation Authorities, who answered in a short e-mail that all information re the validation process of foreign pilot licenses can be found on the Civil Aviation Authorities' website and databases.

After reviewing this information it became clear to me that following the standard process was no longer possible to be completed by December 1st due to the major bureaucratic obstacles. Finally the organizers promised that shortened process would be put in place to accommodate for timely conclusion. We would only need to "send in a scan of every ANR pilot's license including its medical". I tried this approach myself as one of the first ones and got a promptly response from the Organizing Committee's Director Mr. Bani. He confirmed having received the requested information and promised "I'll handle it !". We arranged to have all teams send in their requested information (license&medical) perfectly in time. Still, until November 27th nobody had received any confirmation of validation.

Again, also on this issue, we travelled to Dubai knowing that '*without validation, no ANR competition !!!*'.

The ANR Event Director, Maurice Ducret, and myself agreed, that in case we would not receive neither validation nor airspace allocation until the evening of December 1, we would cancel the complete ANR Championship Event.

Our target was and has always been to deliver a great ANR Competition Event to the participants, making it a great and fun experience. But that included that all surrounding conditions also needed to be in perfect place.

Complications after November 27, 2015

With only 4 days to go, we were now in perfect chaos mode !!! The only things functioning were accommodation, catering, airplanes, office space for GA at the Skydive Dubai Desert Airfield and the local IT infrastructure.

Except the planes, everything else needed for the ANR event was just inexistent. With the enormous pressure of the first training day, December 2nd, deadline looming close, and under the leadership of the ANR Event Director, Maurice Ducret, our ANR Expert Team started to work day and night to fix the open issues. For once, all necessary resources (Avgas, firefighting equipment and –truck, etc.), then a long list of necessary approvals (Airspace, VAC, License Validations, ATC Controller, etc. etc.) Please do apologize that space here is too limited to list every single item of a very long list of serious problems.

I'd like to highlight the issues around the validation of pilot licenses as exemplary for all other problems.

ANR Pilot License Validations

All our airplanes were UAE registered. Therefore every pilot had a mandatory need for UAE validation for the time of the competition.

On December 1st we received a piece of paper saying „Temporary Authorisation to Operate in the UAE“ then „Greetings, The GCAA grant temporary authorisation for the following foreign pilots to operate in the UAE on A6 aircraft during WAG Dubai 2015“. There were 14 pilots listed by name in this paper.

The Polish and the Norwegian teams were the only nations listed in a correct manner. For the other nations, the pilots were partly named 'Navigator' and vice versa. 3 Nations were missing completely.

In addition, Maurice Ducret, as the Event Director, and myself as the International Chief Judge, were missing, although the rules are clearly spelling out that inspection flights need to be conducted beforehand.

Immediately several frenzy phone calls started to address the issues. After 2 hours a GCAA Inspector arrived at the airfield (Mike Rudolph, from New Zealand). He recognized the problem and added the 5 missing teams by hand, including his signature and phone number in case anyone would be asking questions.

On December 2nd (a national holiday notabene) early in the morning we received a note from the flight school, which had provided the airplanes, that they did not accept the hand-written additions by the GCAA representative and that per immediate all airplanes were grounded.

For 8.15AM that same day the first flight planning sessions were scheduled. Frenzy Hecticness erupted again, with nobody being available this time of the day, due to having a national holiday. It soon became clear that we were victim of a prestige fight between the GCAA and the flight school, nobody wanting to loose his face, especially from the flight school with Arabian management.

8.15AM Flight Planning started without flight approvals. First take-off was scheduled for 9AM. At 8.40AM, just 20 minutes prior to that first take-off, the approvals finally came in !!!

On the second day, a new negative surprise: the Russian team would not be allowed to fly due to a lack of clarification of licenses: these were partly written in Cyrillic, and could not be understood. We were told to come up with a complete English translation, signed off by the Russian Aviation Authorities, whereas the translation was not to be provided by a person of Russian nationality (!). Another flying ban was around the corner. As there were many nationalities present at WAG we were able with the help of the FAI to receive the support of the President of the Ukrainian NAC for the translation and from the President of the Russian NAC for a sign off, bringing them together at our airfield, 60 KM out in the desert. Everything needed to be translated, although all important and aviation related information on the licenses is also spelled out in English, and all the Cyrillic is all not aviation related cosmetic non-relevant blabla. Again everything was sent to the GCAA, although no one was in the office due to the National Holiday and people making bridges to the weekend. According to our inspector this was sufficient, though.

Next day was 1st Championship day. With another headwind coming our way. The Russian was informed to be grounded. By coincidence the Russian team was scheduled to fly last, giving us some more time to react, but again the back and forth between the ANR Expert Team and the Authorities started. Finally we received permission again. But this time the flight school director was not in agreement and wanted the Russian team to be grounded again, while the Russian team continued their flight preparations, while Maurice and myself were on the telephone with the flight school in parallel. The director was not available and 'in an important meeting'. We now pulled out all the diplomatic pressures available and notified the person on the phone that 'if there is no approval for the Russian team within the next 5 minutes, we would be informing the Russian Embassy in Dubai, that the Russian team was being discriminated, creating a diplomatic crisis'. You will not believe that the Russian team was in the airplane with the engine running when the approval arrived two and a half minutes before take off !!!

The second Championship day first seemed to start without any further hassles, when the flight school director showed up deciding to ground again all airplanes (Reason: final approval for the Russian team still hadn't arrived and as long there was no solution all airplanes were grounded again). Our last ANR group of the day still had to fly (Portugal, France) and the mail and phone efforts began one more time. Maurice Ducret was able to handle the delicate situation this time with a lot of diplomacy, courtesy and politeness with Capt. Mahmoud and the GCAA, so finally the last ANR group was able to take off with a 30 minute delay, closing off the 2nd Championship day.

The other Championship days we were riding the knife's edge every time. We expected new hindering events any time, and they sure appeared. At the end of the ANR event the full expert team was completely exhausted. Our compensation for all these efforts were the congratulations of the ANR event participants for a well managed event. What did they know about all things happening behind the screens. We tried hard to keep it all away from them. At the end we were all celebrating, pats on the back, congratulations all around, and sharing memories of unforgettable days in Dubai.

Final Remarks and Conclusion

The first ever participation of ANR at the WAG has proven, that the ANR concept works very well at a major event as the WAG. It has been proven, that even such a major ANR event with 16 countries, multiple races, over a period of 10 days can be managed with just 8-10 people. It also has been proven that the concepts of both the qualification rounds and the knock-out system are working perfectly well to create an exciting race atmosphere, as the winners surfaced only at the very last moment, followed by a live crowd in more than 50 countries.

At the same time ALL participants showed their satisfaction with the selected racing mode, not only the final winners, taking exciting stories back to their countries.

Lessons learned for the next WAG

I personally feel it to be of extreme importance that all decision makers at FAI, GAC and Liaison Officer, together with the ANR Expert Team, draw the right conclusions for the next WAG to avoid these highly annoying situations in the future.

From an FAI perspective

Before a new WAG can be allocated to a organizing country, FAI experts will have to inspect the local championship sites for the quality and readiness of the available infrastructure. From this inspection a detailed protocol has to be created, listing all issues and risks to be expected from conducting such a major event at the proposed sites by the local organizers. This protocol then has to be signed off by the National WAG Organizations, as well as from the FAI and each sport discipline involved. Especially the non-qualifying high risk items *MUST* be foreseen with clear ownership and deadlines for fixing the issue.

From a GAC perspective

Every year at GAC Championships in Precision Flying and Rally Flying, *new* and inexperienced staff is being put in place to run the Championships in key positions. At such major events like the WAG it is just absurd though to try to run this highly complex event with inexperienced staff. It is of absolute necessity that GAC is changing its approach to organizing major events and starts establishing a competent and experienced expert team in place, which can be drawn in to the organizational efforts at the earliest stages.

This is the only guarantee to avoid mistakes we have seen appearing at a very early stage with enough maneuvering room for elimination and remediation.

Last but not least

My greatest thanks goes to Event Director Maurice Ducret and his team, as listed below:

ANR International Jury	Cabanero Pedro
ANR Landing Scoring	Jean Birgen
ANR Assistant	Jesus Mas
ANR Scorer	Egli Lorenz
Ground Operation	Kleuser Andreas
Ground Operation	Holzer Sabine
Steward	Bosse Rainer
Electronic landing system	Pietsch Hans
	Kirchner Thomas

And let's also don't forget our Route Planner John Ducret, who managed the design of the many, many Parcours from his home in a perfect manner.

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ANR – WAG Dubai 2015



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