

COELUM.

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by Pablo Arandia.



JANUARY NEWS on Mexican Aviation

COELUM: Pronunciation: 'che-l&m, is Latin for airspace or sky. The Romans began questioning the rights they had in the space above the land they owned and to how high above did that right extended to. Ad coelum et ad inferos, they discussed, meaning that their right of property would extend as high up to the heavens and down to hell.

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For the last two decades, and as time goes by, the technological advances that we have developed are increasing overwhelmingly and advancing faster. As a result, life in society has had to adapt to new technologies and therefore, it is more and more common to hear of the digitalization of industries where machines have begun to replace the work of man. In this same line, the purveyance of services has not wanted to be left behind, so they have also begun with digitalization processes. In that sense, it is common to hear of digital platforms through which service providers have started to work.

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Throughout this article we will discuss the alleged digitalization of the Federal Civil Aviation Agency (AFAC) in Mexico, how this digitalization should really be and what have been the challenges faced by the AFAC throughout the global pandemic that we have lived in for the past year.

At the end of the first quarter of last year when the pandemic reached Mexico, many government agencies, both federal and local, made the decision to close their doors and suspend the services they provided until the pandemic was controlled; however, when no progress was made and as a result of the increase of COVID-19 cases in Mexico, several public agencies, including the AFAC, decided to start a digitalization processes so that their users would not continue to be affected and their work would not be delayed.

That being said, what did AFAC mean by "digitalization"? AFAC started the digitalization by enabling only two e-mails, as well as two telephone lines for two public officials, so that AFAC users could submit their paperwork. However, this alleged digitalization has been a complete failure.

There are many reasons why AFAC, in general, has utterly failed throughout 2020, and appears set to be a failure for 2021, but why was the attempted digitalization of AFAC such a failure? First of all, we cannot speak of a digitalization of the work of AFAC if the Agency itself does not have a digital platform that facilitates the

submission of documents to carry out administrative procedures. AFAC's digitalization consists of two e-mails addresses, but what is the problem with e-mails? The problem with submitting the corresponding paperwork by e-mail is that the inboxes were often saturated, due to the large number of procedures received, making it impossible to submit proceedings and, similarly, it was nearly impossible to submit the corresponding paperwork as the email turned out to be too heavy to be sent, due to the amount of attached PDF files. Secondly, not all the procedures that can usually be submitted before AFAC are enabled for submission through what they call "electronic counter". At the beginning of its digitalization, AFAC published a note with the procedures that could be submitted through the enabled emails; ever since, this publication has undergone several changes, such as increasing the number of procedures that can be submitted through the "electronic counter", thus trying to make their work more efficient. Notwithstanding, even with such amendments, the "digital counter" is still not working properly. Thirdly, users cannot follow up on their procedures nor the procedures' status, which has caused the work of AFAC to lag tremendously. Fourthly, since AFAC has had such a lag, it has not been able to issue the corresponding official documents for the procedures submitted through the "electronic counter", causing uncertainty to all its users.

As we know, the AFAC always has been a disappointment and an inefficient and bureaucratic government institution, getting worse with the forced closure and with the implementation of the "electronic counter" that has turned into a real hoax. Unfortunately, this is the reality, in Mexico we have an inefficient, ineffective and exceeded in capacity and capability aviation authority. Until AFAC understands that digitalization is not only scanning documents through a digital medium but adapting the entire process through the implementation of electronic processes, it will never be able to digitalize, and will never be able to have a fundamental change and restructuring in its functionality.

On the other hand, it is also important to mention in this publication that since December 1, 2020 until February 1, 2021, when Retired General Carlos Antonio Rodríguez Munguía was designated by Andres Manuel López Obrador as General Director, the AFAC was working without someone in charge, since on November 25 of last year, Rodrigo Vázquez Colmenares resigned, so till the beginning of this month, the AFAC was adrift, without a clear direction and

without a head to direct it and try to retake the course to face this 2021; consequently, this caused a brutal uncertainty for the users of the AFAC, as well as for the public officials who work in it and, of course, is one of the most important reasons why the AFAC, in general, was a complete disaster.

Nonetheless, it seems that not everything is adrift for AFAC. Before leaving office, Rodrigo Vázquez Colmenares, the former head of the AFAC, stated that, in due course, what will be called e-AFAC will be implemented. The e-AFAC, in theory, will be a platform intended to strengthen the Agency's management capacity, by optimizing operational processes. This platform is the key for a fundamental transformation of AFAC, ensuring the presence of an effective aeronautical authority in Mexico, efficient and able to respond in real time, aiming to optimize internal processes, and procedures to be carried out aligning to the provisions set forth by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

If the e-AFAC becomes a reality, then we would be able to speak of a true digitalization, since by developing this platform, it would be possible to adopt new technologies necessary to improve, define priorities, make procedures more efficient, respond in real time and be at the forefront of innovation, by restructuring its operation in depth and allowing it to operate digitally. Unfortunately, this is only the way things should be, although we are not certain that this will be the case in the near future.

In this regard, it is important to mention that, according to what has been published in several notes, the e-AFAC would be based on an already existing system and digital platform designed by and for regulators to meet their responsibilities, the EMPIC Integral System (EMPIC). EMPIC is part of the privately held HEITEC Group, which represents industry expertise in automation, digitalization, and electronics; EMPIC is a German company founded in November 2001, dedicated to providing regulatory oversight software to the market sector of aviation regulators, making them increase their productivity and optimize their services providing technologically high-quality, reliable, and economical solutions, recognized by ICAO and by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

This platform is a configurable standard software, tailor-made for aviation regulators; it handles the day-to-day tasks associated with accepting applications, making assessments of their suitability, issuing approvals/licenses,

etc, together with the subsequent continuing oversight. Among the solutions that EMPIC offers are the following:

1. Personnel licenses (e.g., Air Traffic Controller licenses);
2. Technical areas (e.g., technical certifications, including airworthiness directives and environmental certificates);
3. Central modules (e.g., document management); and,
4. Organizational approval and oversight (e.g., air operators).

Currently 30 countries use the EMPIC Integral System, either for air, land or maritime regulators, among which are: Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Italy, Ireland, Greece, France, Belgium, Germany, South Africa and others.

That said, it is important to compare the experience of the countries already using this platform with the way in which the AFAC's "electronic counter" has been functioning. Based on the Norwegian experience, EMPIC gives great support to the Civil Aviation Authority within their core tasks and processes, like organizational approval and the related oversight activities, personal licensing, and aircraft registration and surveillance. Based on the South African experience, EMPIC's Enterprise Business System, since implemented, their working practices have been transformed for the better and their ICAO USOAP scores improved significantly, as stated by them. And, in opposite situation, and as said before, the AFAC is less efficient, effective and not able to respond to all the applications sent to it via e-mail.

Therefore, we can conclude that AFAC is not yet in the process of digitalization, since enabling two e-mail addresses to handle paperwork electronically is not comparable to the creation of electronic processes to handle the proceedings that are filed, but only to receive scanned documents by this means. That being said, AFAC must take up the proposal of the former head, Rodrigo Vázquez Colmenares, to develop the e-AFAC and restructure its operation to allow its operation to be digital and not remain as a mere proposal. . Finally, it was urgent to appoint a person capable of leading AFAC, and it seems that in Retired General Carlos Antonio Rodríguez Munguía will take over this year.

AICM increases the 'TUA' rate by 1.1%.

The International Airport of Mexico City (AICM) published information regarding the new Airport Use Fee (TUA) for 2021, which will cost \$24.50 dollars (\$489.402 Mexican pesos) for domestic flights and \$46.52 dollars (\$929.264 Mexican pesos) for international flights, or 1.1% more than the fee charged in 2020. According to statements made by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the Latin American and Caribbean Air Transport Association (ALTA), Mexico's City International Airport (AICM) is the second most expensive airport in the world for this fee, surpassing others such as London Heathrow, Charles de Gaulle in Paris, Madrid Barajas or Narita in Japan. www.transponder1200.com/aumenta-en-mexico-el-impuesto-tua-en-1-1/ January 06, 2021.

Airworthiness is at risk on airports.

The Federal Civil Aviation Agency (AFAC) does not have the means to certify arrival, departure and approach routes, using the required navigation system based on the aircraft's performance. We are referring to the RNP (Required Navigation Performance), which is very delicate because it involves parameters of accuracy, availability, integrity and continuity that the aircraft's navigation equipment must meet. The Mexican Airspace Navigation Services (SENEAM) have said that this system is ready to be used, but the Undersecretariat of Transportation has remained silent about it. The reasons why the Undersecretary of Transportation, Carlos Moran, has preferred to use the traditional system, the satellite navigation system or PBN (Performance Based Navigation), remain unknown. www.elfinanciero.com.mx/opinion/dario-celis/en-riesgo-la-aeronavegabilidad-en-los-aeropuertos January 14, 2021.

Tests, Vaccines: Keys to Aviation's Recovery.

Travel restrictions were gradually eased throughout 2020, but this trend took a turn after the holidays as COVID-19 cases rose and a new strain of the virus was identified, leading some countries to revise their travel regulations. Under these circumstances, industry associations are urging governments to replace restrictions with testing and, eventually, vaccination. "Recovery needs testing to replace quarantine measures," said Alexandre de Juniac, Director General and CEO of IATA. That is why some countries, like the US, are already requesting a negative COVID-19 test from all travelers. On the other hand, IATA has recently introduced its Travel Pass, which among other features allows users to upload test results or vaccination certificates, to facilitate travel and guarantee access to a reliable and safe system. www.mexicobusiness.news/aerospace/news/tests-vaccines-keys-aviations-recovery?tag=aerospace January 19, 2021.

Mexican Airport Groups Invest in Infrastructure Amid Pandemic.

Despite the radical contraction in passenger traffic, airport groups are using this period to invest in their infrastructure in preparation for better times. Grupo Aeroportuario del Pacífico (GAP), which operates 12 airports in Mexico, announced a MX\$25 billion (US\$1.25 billion) investment that will allow it to double its capacity by 2026. Grupo Aeroportuario Centro Norte (OMA), also indicated that the company is planning a multimillion-dollar investment. "We see the future with optimism. We have the largest investment plan in our history: MX\$12 billion (US\$600 million) in the next five years," said Ricardo Dueñas, Director General. www.mexicobusiness.news/aerospace/news/mexican-airport-groups-invest-infrastructure-amid-pandemic?tag=aerospace January 22, 2021.

ICAO urges governments to accept COVID-19 test results.

The General Secretary of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Dr. Fang Liu, called on member states to accept negative COVID-19 test results to avoid further impact to the travel and tourism industries. "Proper certification of vaccines may be required in the near future, but in the meantime, international acceptance of test results should be a key priority", declared Liu. In collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA), efforts to standardize vaccination certificates and covid-19 test results are being pursued, promoting mutual recognition for a possible reduction of quarantine measures. These solutions are meant to be respectful of privacy and personal data, adaptable to different infrastructures and conditions, and economically reasonable for all stakeholders. www.a21.com.mx/aerolineas/2021/01/22/insta-oacique-gobiernos-acepten-resultados-de-pruebas-covid January 22, 2021.

In this month extract was prepared by A. Fragoso, A. De la Fuente, R. Nerio, R. Mancilla, J. García.

Aircraft to use 100% biofuel by 2030.

The manufacturer Boeing pledged that all its commercial aircraft will be capable and certified to fly on 100% sustainable fuel by 2030. The U.S. company explained that it will determine what changes are required so that its current and future commercial aircraft can operate only on fully sustainable turbo fuel. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the Air Transport Action Group, among other organizations, sustainable aviation fuels reduce CO2 emissions by up to 80%, so they are seeking to reach 100%. www.a21.com.mx/index.php/aeronautica/2021/01/24/aviones-usaran-100-de-biocombustible-para-2030 January 24, 2021.

Vaccine optimism was short-lived: IATA.

The International Air Transport Association stated that the announcement of the commencement of vaccination campaigns against COVID-19 supported the recovery of airlines; however, the optimism was short-lived, as the expected reactivation of demand was not reflected in financial results. It is no surprise, the airline industry continues to be in the doldrums due to low passenger confidence in air transportation, leading to a marginal recovery in demand due to the prevalence of restrictive measures such as the imposition of mandatory quarantines. www.a21.com.mx/index.php/aerolineas/2021/01/24/optimismo-por-vacuna-duro-poco-iata January 24, 2021.

Passenger traffic decreased 51% in 2020.

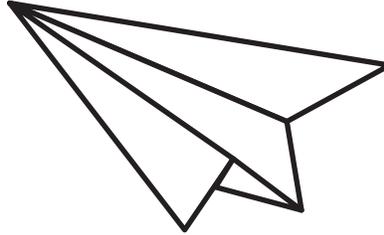
In 2020, Mexican airlines carried a total of 34.12 million passengers, a 51% drop from what they recorded in 2019, prior to the covid-19 pandemic, reported the Secretary of Communications and Transportation (SCT). In fact, the crisis reduced passenger traffic to 2012 levels. Likewise, the eight airlines that operated commercially during 2020 carried 28.23 million passengers in the domestic market, down 47% from the previous year. www.a21.com.mx/aerolineas/2021/01/25/disminuyo-51-trafico-de-pasajeros-en-2020 January 25, 2021.

US quarantine requirement seen as new blow to tourism and airline travel.

A requirement for travelers entering the United States to go into self-quarantine will not be good for Mexican tourism, according to an aviation and tourism expert. United States President Joe Biden signed an executive order that requires travelers to produce proof of a recent negative Covid-19 test and comply with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines concerning international travel, including recommended periods of self-quarantine. The quarantine requirement is a blow for Mexican and foreign airlines that fly between the United States and Mexico and vice versa. Demand for air travel between the two countries and airlines' revenue will both fall, he said. www.mexiconewsdaily.com/news/coronavirus/us-quarantine-requirement-seen-as-new-blow-to-tourism-and-airline-travel/ January 25, 2021.

General Rodríguez Munguía appointed director of AFAC.

The former commander of the Mexican Air Force (FAM), General Carlos Antonio Rodríguez Munguía, will assume the direction of the Federal Civil Aviation Agency (AFAC) as of February 1, as appointed by the Secretariat of Communications and Transportation. He has served as commander of the Northeast Air Region (2018), as well as the Southeast Air Region (2014), Chief of the General Staff of the Mexican Air Force, Commander of an Air Region (Santa Lucía, State of Mexico), and Operational Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Mexican Air Force, among other positions. It will be quite challenging to take the reins in the middle of an audit carried out by the Federal Civil Aviation Administration (FAA) of the United States that began in October last year. www.a21.com.mx/index.php/aeronautica/2021/01/26/nombran-al-general-rodriguez-munguia-director-de-afac January 26, 2021.



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