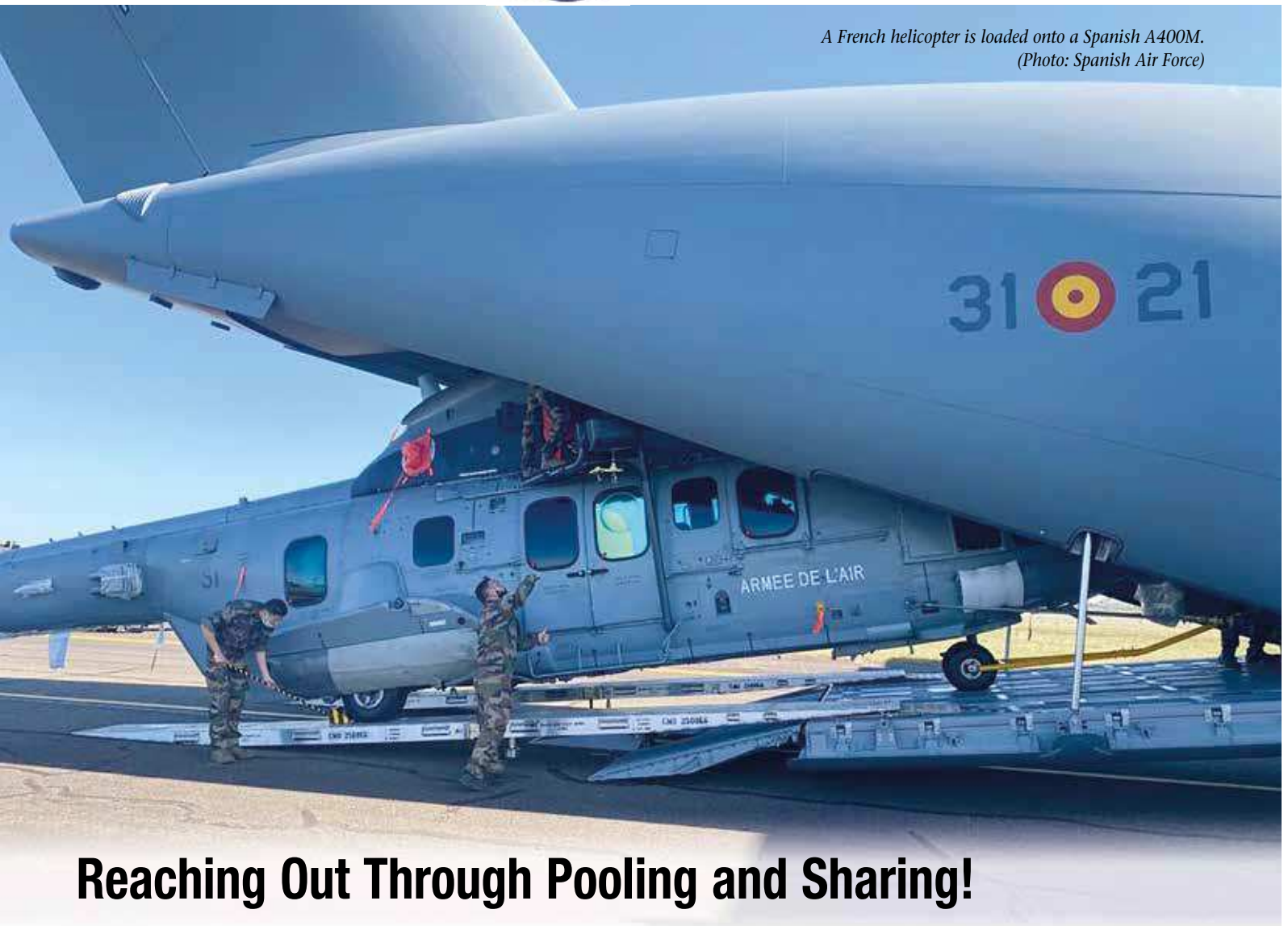


*A French helicopter is loaded onto a Spanish A400M.
 (Photo: Spanish Air Force)*



Reaching Out Through Pooling and Sharing!

April 2021. A French request flashes up in MEAT. A helicopter is to be transported to the United States in order to participate in the aerial combat training exercise called RED FLAG. EATC's planners spring to action. First, they look for a suitable type of aircraft to fit the helicopter. Their decision is swift and precise: an A400M. Then they check which A400M is available to fly the mission on the indicated date. French A400M assets are already engaged elsewhere. But they spot a German A400M that is still available for a mission. The planners coordinate with the German and French national point of contacts. Upon the latter's approval, the mission planning process is launched. But then, the planners and taskers run out of luck! They are only a couple of days before the scheduled departure and everything seems to run at best. Unforeseen circumstances occur: the German A400M is urgently required to support the catastrophic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in India. Humanitarian aid missions have one of EATC's highest operational criteria prioritisation and precede any logistical missions. A new option needs to be found. The helicopter has to be transported to the United States on time. No delay acceptable! The RED FLAG exercise is going to take off. EATC's experts need to reassess the options and availabilities. They have to find an alternative solution. Without delay as time runs out. Within only a few hours, they manage to earmark a Spanish A400M for the mission. A quick and pragmatic coordination process starts with the Spanish and French representatives.

Go ...

EATC's experts plan the mission according to the new modalities. From that moment on, no more surprises! EATC's mission control centre commands and controls the mission successfully and the French helicopter participates as planned in the RED FLAG exercise.

This is a perfect example to show what EATC stands for: pooling and sharing air mobility aircraft assets and guaranteeing support to partners when needed. EATC's Pooling & Sharing mechanism is the best and fastest way to find a solution when no national aircraft is available. This is, of course, only possible because EATC member nations are willing to join efforts and to pool their aircraft under one single command. The example also reveals how vital it is to offer streamlined standard procedures. These are necessary to execute successfully air mobility missions, and especially cross-national missions, involving multiple partners. EATC's operational procedures are well defined and revised on a yearly basis between the internal and external actors.

Who Pays Who?

Our example brings up the question of who pays Spain for providing a service to France. Basically, the two nations may decide bilaterally on any way of settling the bill. However, the principle between the EATC nations is the ATARES agreement.



ATARES does not involve cash exchange. It is based on an Equivalent Flying Hour (EFH) reference, defined as the cost of “one C130/C160 flying hour”. All other aircraft types are calculated against this one EFH. To come back to our example, Spain was credited its ATARES balance according to the pre-fixed A400M rate, and France was debited the same amount of EFH. This system is, however, not based on purely bilateral reciprocity. In other words, France and Spain do not have to settle their balance bilaterally, but they operate in a global multinational framework between all ATARES members. All EATC member nations have signed the ATARES agreement and exchange services through this framework.^[1]

The ATARES agreement offers optimisation of the aircraft available space and exchange of services among our nations. Although ATARES missions, compared to all missions, are outnumbered, these cross-national missions are the essence of the pooling and sharing system and of the continuous search for the maximum effectiveness and efficiency in the use of the available assets.

In Times of Crisis

This is even more important in times, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, when the demand exceeds the national capabilities. Having privileged access to the EATC partners’ capabilities offers the possibilities to fulfil national needs when own means are not available or already engaged. The beginning of the pandemic resulted in a reduction of the total number of standard missions, caused by a rapidly changing environment and associated restrictive national regulations and procedures. At the same time, however, the needs for aeromedical evacuation and humanitarian aid missions increased significantly. EATC adapted swiftly to the new circumstances, among others thanks to the standing operational procedures. These turned out to be fully adapted to this crisis situation.

To fulfil these increased requirements, EATC experts took advantage of the great variety of available assets capable of supporting the pandemic requirements – from pure logistics up to intensive care missions. In the end, this led to continuous mutual support transporting urgent medical material, repatriating citizens or evacuating patients, thus saving lives and satisfying national demands.

A Reliable and Efficient Air Network

One of the EATC Commander’s priorities for his tenure is to offer as soon as possible a reliable air network. This network of predefined and regular scheduled routes is to serve common destinations with the objective of maximising the use of aircraft’s available space. This is a step further in the optimisation of the use of national assets. The concept emerged from the constant strive for better efficiency as well as to respond to the nations’ requests to compensate for potential air mobility shortfalls in a transition phase when nations are building up new generation fleets.





In 2018, EATC decided to take a proactive stance. The first step was the introduction of a shared inter-theatre shuttle system: to set up pre-scheduled regular cargo and personnel flights to the most common destinations and to resupplying ongoing operations. The final and more strategic goal will be to set up a flexible and integrated worldwide air mobility network. Main operating bases in the member nations will be connected to each other as well as to land and sea transport solutions (hub-and-spoke system). The aim is to further increase the effectiveness and especially the efficiency of EATC's mission conduct, thus freeing assets to conduct other mission tasks.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 restrictions had an impact on the timelines of this concept. Therefore, a testing phase for the first step at a reduced scale was initiated belated in 2021. Based on known data and a theoretical approach, broad margins for cost-efficiency were identified and three initial "primary routes" were defined. They go to West and Central Africa, as well as the Middle East. These initial bi or tri-national shuttle are the basis to prove the feasibility

of the concept, to learn initial lessons and to make the necessary adjustments. Initial results are expected this year.

There is still a way to go. We take up the challenge to provide a well-defined multinational air network that will boost the exchange of services among EATC's members and emphasise the value of EATC's pooling and sharing concept.

Conclusion

EATC's success comes through a comprehensive multinational approach. We are continuously looking for effectiveness and efficiency through our pooling and sharing concept or through innovative solutions. The cooperative efforts go far however beyond commanding missions for the seven member nations. The "Sponsor Nation Concept" offers the cornerstone for support to non-EATC nations or multinational organisations and is based on similar processes or the ATARES agreement.

EATC's member nations are more than ever committed to the pooling and sharing principle. EATC experiences this engagement on a daily basis. A recent example is the redeployment from Afghanistan where the nations rely on each other to share assets and tasks, and allow a smooth and timely re-deployment of everyone's personnel.



*A Dutch KDC10 and a German A400M in the aftermath of Hurricane "Irma".
(Photo: Royal Netherlands Air Force)*

^[1] The Movement Coordination Centre Europe (MCCE) hosts the ATARES secretariat that generates and validates the EFH balances of the 28 ATARES member nations. Moreover, the Director MCCE has been elected on a yearly basis to chair the ATARES Coordinating Board.

