

New collective labour agreement for air traffic controllers signed; majority vote in favour of new accord, one of four unions pulls out

Geneva, 10 July 2018. The Canton Geneva Chamber on Collective Labour Agreement Relations (CRCT) has been striving since 23 April to reconcile the differences of opinion between Swiss air navigation services provider skyguide and the Skycontrol air traffic controllers' union over a new collective labour agreement (CLA) for the company's air traffic controllers. In the course of its endeavours, the cantonal mediation body ultimately extended the process to all four of skyguide's air traffic controller unions, and a final version was negotiated of the proposed new CLA. Skycontrol, which had initiated the mediation procedure, was the only union to leave the negotiating table, which it did early on in the process. The further three unions and skyguide brought their negotiations to a successful conclusion.

Skycontrol was also the only one of the four controllers' unions which declined to put the result of the negotiations to a referendum among its members. The CRCT ruled, however, that all of skyguide's air traffic controllers had to be permitted to participate in the referendum process. The result of the referendum was announced yesterday (9 July). With a voter turnout of 85%, a clear majority (61%) of all controllers and three of the four unions (i.e. all except Skycontrol) plus the group of non-unionised controllers approved the proposed new CLA. The new CLA was signed by all the signatory parties (i.e. excluding Skycontrol) at midday today, and applies to all the controllers concerned with immediate effect.

Above-average terms of employment further improved

Today's signature of the new CLA brings a two-year negotiating process to an end. The new accord not only secures the already highly favourable terms and conditions of employment of skyguide's air traffic controllers for another three years; it also further enhances them, but does so within a framework that neither torpedoes the mid-to-long-term interests of Swiss aviation nor destabilises skyguide's financial situation.

Skyguide remained cooperative throughout these CLA negotiations, and improved its own offer several times. The company's air traffic controllers perform demanding duties with sizeable responsibilities which are remunerated accordingly. Their current terms and conditions of employment are above average, and skyguide air traffic controllers are among Switzerland's highest-earning professionals.

Skyguide condemns call for strike action

Despite these substantially above-average working conditions, one of skyguide's four air traffic controllers' unions – Skycontrol – believes that these terms of employment are not good enough, and has therefore urged its

members to take strike action. Skycontrol represents en-route and approach controllers in Geneva, but not the controllers in Geneva Tower. Its members also work at the regional airports of Sion and Bern.

Skyguide, as Switzerland's air navigation services provider, categorically condemns this call for industrial action, which has been issued by a few militant members of Skycontrol's executive committee. "An action of this kind would be both unwarranted and irresponsible," says skyguide's CEO Alex Bristol. "The actions of a handful of activists would be highly detrimental to the interests of the Swiss people and the Swiss economy, especially in Western Switzerland. But we should also bear in mind that the vast majority of our skyguide air traffic controllers would not join in any such strike action."

Should Skycontrol carry out its strike threat, the resulting industrial action could severely restrict air traffic volumes, especially in Western Switzerland. "The negative effects of the actions of a small group of activists on our customers and our partners – particularly Geneva Airport, the airlines and their passengers – would be extremely regrettable," says Urs Lauener, skyguide's Chief Operating Officer. "So in the interests of everyone concerned, we continue to expect Skycontrol's militant leaders to refrain from such drastic action and to return to our social partnership."

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Skyguide provides air navigation services for Switzerland and certain adjacent parts of neighbouring countries. With its 1,500 employees at 14 locations in Switzerland, the company guides some 1.2 million civil and military flights a year safely and efficiently through Europe's busiest airspace. Skyguide is well integrated into the international air navigation services community and, with its innovative and customer-minded solutions, helps enhance Switzerland's appeal as a place to live, work and do business. The company is majority-owned by the Swiss Confederation, and is headquartered in Geneva.
