Europe Nears First Single-Pilot Airliner Certification – Unions Raise Safety Concerns

[Nathan Racine](https://aerocrewnews.com/author/nate1026/)

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The aviation industry stands on the ridge of a significant transformation with the impending introduction of Extended Minimum Crew Operations (eMCO), touted by Airbus as the future of single-pilot cruise operations. Scheduled for debut in 2027, single-pilot cruise operations represent a seismic departure from traditional multi-pilot crews, relying heavily on automation. Yet, amidst Airbus' push for eMCO's implementation, grave concerns arise, particularly as the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) lags in completing a comprehensive safety study.

At the heart of the [apprehension](https://www.eurocockpit.eu/news/emco-threat-commercial-aviation-safety) surrounding single-pilot cruise operations lies the alarming prospect of entrusting sole responsibility to automated systems in the cockpit. Despite technological advances, automation remains fallible, prone to malfunctions and errors that a lone pilot would grapple with during in-flight emergencies. While Airbus races to assert dominance in the face of Boeing's challenges, the accelerated rollout of eMCO raises troubling questions about prioritizing profit over safety.

Human factors, including fatigue and cognitive limitations, compound the inherent risks of single-pilot operations. Operating an aircraft demands unwavering attention and rapid decision making, qualities that may be compromised when a lone pilot shoulders all safety responsibilities. With eMCO set to debut in cruise operations by 2027, the strain on pilots during critical phases of flight cannot be overstated.

In the pursuit of innovation, Europe's largest pilot union, the European Cockpit Association (ECA), says safety must remain paramount. Airbus and industry stakeholders must heed the warnings of pilot unions and safety advocates, ensuring that implementation is not rushed at the expense of safety. While technological advancement may be enticing, the skies must remain a sanctuary of safety. It remains unclear how eMCO will impact air safety despite its rollout planned for 2027.

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Nathan Racine is a dedicated District Advocate for the Air Line Pilots Association Political Action Committee (ALPA PAC), focusing on aviation safety and policy issues. In addition to his advocacy role, he is an experienced airline pilot and a certified Instructor/Evaluator (I/E). He holds a Master’s degree in Occupational Psychology from the University of Liverpool (U.K.), specializing in Human Factors and Crew Resource Management. In his spare time, he also volunteers for a pilot crisis and resource hotline on behalf of ALPA. Nathan's commitment to improving aviation safety is at the core of his professional work. Nathan can be reached at nathan.racine@alpa.org