

CPDLC in Europe: Handy New Guidance from Eurocontrol

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Eurocontrol has put out a new two-page CPDLC cheat sheet for European operations. It's short, non-technical and really useful – especially if you don't use CPDLC everyday.



Recommended Practices for CPDLC in Europe

- 2026 -

CPDLC Logon is mandatory in most of European airspace.

CPDLC usage helps to prevent Loss of Communication incidents and significantly improves ATC capacity.

Your participation and commitment is key!

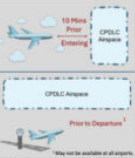
Preparation for Log-On

- FMC/CDU Flight INIT:
 - Check DEP/ARR airport, load route if available
 - Valid/correct FLT NBR (callsign)
- Ensure **ATN** logon for Europe → **not** FANS1/A
- Prepare first ATC Logon address
 - Chart provider, AIP or SID



When to Log-On

- As soon as possible, considering your company's SOPs
- According to ICAO: see picture

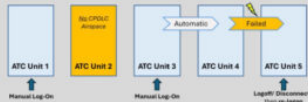


Good practices:

- Don't know the logon address? Log-On failed? Ask ATC by voice!
- Check CPDLC connection after passing 10,000 ft
- Report **UNABLE** CPDLC unless the issue is due to known GNSS interference

When to Manually Log-On + How to Maintain Log-On

- Entering first CPDLC airspace (ATC Unit 1)
- Current airspace is not CPDLC equipped (ATC Unit 2), log-on to ATC Unit 3
- If the automatic handover fails = no new "Current ATC Unit" message is received after ATC callsign change
 - Log-off & log-on to new ATC Unit (e.g. Unit 5)



✖ New ATC?
Check CPDLC Log-On!

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and does not replace official SOPs, OM-C and regulatory requirements. In case of discrepancies, the applicable SOPs, OM-C and regulations take precedence. Pilots are responsible for ensuring compliance with all relevant procedures.

Why did my Log-On not work?



- Attempted log-on to an ATC unit not included in your FPL
- Entered an incorrect log-on identifier (e.g. EDVV instead of EDYY)
- Check: LOGON/STATUS menu, verify entries above, and reattempt the log-on
- Confirm VHF3 set to "DATA"; perform log-off, log-on
- ATC flight plan not updated after aircraft change (Field 18 CODE/ mismatch)

Why Still Voice Clearances If I Am Logged-On?



- Time-critical situations (e.g. RoC/ RoD)
- Slow network performance → Uplink got lost
- Customer service considerations: immediate voice clearance may e.g. prevent level-off
- Technical restrictions on ATC side

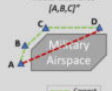
Uplink Message Handling

Ensure closed loop understanding of CPDLC clearances

- Any CPDLC clearance is valid until revoked or expired. ATC monitors the execution.
- ATC may confirm CPDLC clearances by voice due to network errors triggering ground alerts
- If you are instructed to "DISREGARD CPDLC". Close the dialogue → Ensures air-ground synchronisation

Airbus only: If the message is over 2 minutes old, confirm with ATC via voice before acting. Newer aircraft (FANS-C) allow pilot responses even after ground timeout (120 seconds)

"CLEARED TO [Waypoint D] VIA [A B C]"



What it means:

- The uplink message "CLEARED TO" includes multiple waypoints and is a ROUTE CHANGE, not a direct clearance
- Do not mistake with "PROCEED DIRECT TO" CPDLC clearance which only contains one waypoint

Why ATC uses it:

- Optimise routings, e.g. around military airspace

"Cleared to D via Route clearance A,B,C"



Good CPDLC Practices



- A CPDLC clearance holds the same value as a voice clearance → e.g. assigned speeds are **not** automatically cancelled
- Do:
 - Use the LOAD function to avoid errors - if available
 - Reply to "ADVISE/STATE PREFERRED LEVEL" uplink with the response (not REQUEST)
 - Use CPDLC for requests as relevant
- Do Not:
 - Disconnect from CPDLC intentionally → It is considered equal to disabling your radio!
 - Error upon downlink? Revert to voice for clarification!
- Learn more about CPDLC: ICAO Doc 10037 GOLD Manual

EUROCONTROL Operational Focus Group | efg@eurocontrol.eu | <https://www.eurocontrol.eu/function/datalink>

You can download the PDF on the Eurocontrol site here (best place to go in case they update it again), or if

that doesn't work, here's one we downloaded earlier!

The interesting part isn't the basics though. Most crew already know that CPDLC is mandatory in much of Europe. What's more juicy is the **human factors** stuff – the small misunderstandings and bad habits that are still creating problems out there.

This guidance serves as a reminder of some **persistent errors**. Here is a brief summary of those.

CLEARED TO vs. PROCEED DIRECT TO

Make sure you follow the clearance correctly.

EUROCONTROL points out that a CPDLC uplink saying “CLEARED TO [WAYPOINT D] VIA [A B C] is a route clearance, **not a direct-to shortcut**.

Those are issued by the phrase “PROCEED DIRECT TO.” Apparently enough of us are still getting this wrong to be specifically mentioned in the bulletin.

Assigned speeds don't just disappear

The guide warns crew not to assume a CPDLC speed restriction quietly disappears just because the aircraft later gets another route or level clearance. It's no different to a voice clearance, **an assigned speed sticks unless you are told otherwise**.

Why would this be happening? *A few suggestions.*

It's possible that pilots **load the route amendment but miss the associated speed**. Mixed voice and CPDLC environments can also create ambiguity about which clearance is 'current' – more on that in moment.

Then there's workload – especially in dense European airspace. When we get busy, **it can be easy to overlook an old datalink clearance** sitting in the message stack.

Don't deliberately log-off

This is a biggie.

EUROCONTROL reminds us that a CPDLC clearance holds the same value as a voice clearance. Deliberately disconnecting or turning off CPDLC is akin to turning off your radios. **Just don't do it**. Why would crew be doing this? We don't know – but reverting *yourself* to voice is no-bueno.

Why do we still get voice clearances, even when fully logged on?

Some clearances are too urgent – voice is just quicker, especially in the case of level changes. Switching to voice rather than waiting for a CPDLC message to be sent and received can avoid an unnecessary level-off.

Then there's network performance – no technology is perfect 100% all of the time, and things can slow down.

And simple practicality for the controller. It may just be easier to hop on voice.

Failed Log Ons

We've all been there – a logon simply refuses to work without explanation. It's extremely frustrating!

In many cases the problem comes down to **small setup errors** – the wrong logon code, an outdated flight plan after an aircraft swap, or trying to connect to a sector that's not included in your filed route.

Even something as simple as the wrong callsign format or VHF3 not being set to DATA can stop the connection. The fall back is to immediately revert to voice, but this adds workload for all concerned.

It's not complicated, just human

There's nothing terribly difficult or technical in Eurocontrol's new guidance, but it does highlight how CPDLC introduces its own traps – especially in busy, unfamiliar airspace where crews may switch between voice and CPDLC several times in just one flight.

The guide is a useful reminder that getting the basics right with CPDLC is just as important as good radio discipline.

One extra point (especially for US operators)

Europe is a little different when it comes to CPDLC. Much of the network uses the **ATN system over VHF datalink rather than the FANS over SATCOM/HF** more commonly associated with oceanic ops. So in practical terms, losing the aircraft's VHF datalink capability will often mean losing European ATN CPDLC capability as well.

The transition from oceanic to European airspace can also be a little confusing! In many cases, ATC systems handle the transfer between oceanic FANS services and European ATN CPDLC automatically, and **crews should avoid manually logging** off unless instructed by ATC or unless the handover has clearly failed.

NATS has told us that unnecessary crew logoffs near FIR boundaries can create additional ATC workload and may interfere with automatic handovers between current and next data authorities.

That said, datalink issues during the oceanic-to-European transition **still generate plenty of pilot reports** – particularly among operators less familiar with European ATN operations. Different avionics setups can also behave differently during the transition, which can occasionally catch crews out.

Bottom line – monitor the aircraft's CPDLC status during the transition into Europe, and follow ATC instructions before manually disconnecting or attempting a new logon.