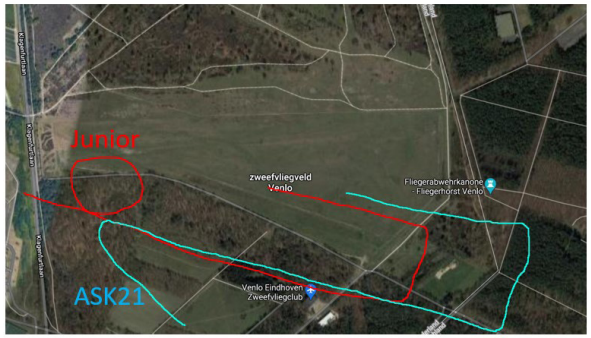
Airprox, PZL-Bielsko SZD-51-1 "Junior", PH-980, Alexander Schleicher ASK 21, PH-1606, Venlo glider airfield,
22 October 2020

The Junior and the ASK 21 were simultaneously flying close to the circuit starting point to join the left-hand circuit for runway 29. Visibility was more than 10 kilometres. The Junior was flying at an altitude of 220 metres when the pilot observed the ASK 21 approaching from the right, at practically the same altitude. As a result, he felt obliged to initiate a 360 degree turn to the left, in order to avoid a collision between the two aircraft. The ASK 21 made a right-hand turn towards the downwind leg. The pilot of the Junior then followed the ASK 21 into the circuit and informed the occupants of the ASK 21 via the radio that he was flying behind them, low, and requested them to take the outside bend. Having received no response on the radio, on the base leg, he flew past and in front of the ASK 21. Both gliders completed a safe landing.

The pilot of the Junior stated that he had only seen the ASK 21 at the last moment, because the aircraft was approaching him head on. Previously, no movement of the ASK 21 had been visible to him, until the aircraft made a right-hand turn to join the circuit. In addition, from the point of view of the Junior, the visible surface of the ASK 21 was minimal. The instructor and trainee in the ASK 21 subsequently declared that they had not seen the Junior close to the circuit starting point. The minimal contrast between the white gliders and the pale blue/white sky (in the background) probably also represented a factor in the late observation or non-observation of the aircraft.



Flight paths completed by both gliders. (Source: Gliding club)

In neither aircraft had the FLARM issued a warning. The cause of this was that the FLARM in the ASK 21 was defective. The occupants of the ASK 21 had not heard the radio call that was intended for them because the transmitter of the radio in the Junior was not working correctly. In other words, both gliders demonstrated defects. The defects were already known before the start of the flight. In particular a fully functioning FLARM is able to notify pilots of an approaching collision hazard on time, thereby leaving sufficient time to evaluate the situation and if necessary to undertake an evasive manoeuvre. A FLARM should be seen as the last line of defence and may never take the place of a 'see and avoid' concept.

The airprox occurred because the pilots observed each other late or not at all, respectively. Thanks to the adequate evasive manoeuvre by the pilot of the Junior, a collision was avoided. In accordance with the right-of-way rules[20], he was also required to give way to the ASK 21, since it was located on his right-hand side, and both aircraft were at intersecting headings, at approximately the same altitude.

20 EASA, *Easy Access Rules for Standardised European Rules of the Air (SERA)*, SERA.3210 Right-of-way, December 2020.

It is important that anyone participating in gliding activities realizes that the majority of defects on a glider can have an adverse impact on flight safety. It is therefore essential that every defect be reported, examined and assessed, and that the aircraft in question only returns to service once it is determined that the aircraft can be used safely.

The Safety Committee (VC) of the gliding club conducted an investigation into the occurrence and shared its findings with the Dutch Safety Board. The occurrence was reported to the Dutch Safety Board on 3 April 2021. Due to the late reporting of the occurrence, for this report, the Safety Board made use of the report drawn up by the Safety Committee.

Classification: *Serious incident*
Reference: *2020096*