ExecuJet makes German connection

Acquisition of Frankfurt-based Bombardier operator gives Swiss charter specialist route into fourth-biggest market

Swiss business-aviation group ExecuJet Aviation has launched an expansion drive into the lucrative German market, buying Frankfurt-based Jet Connection, a fellow Bombardier operator.

The acquisition adds Jet Connection's two Learjet 60s and one Challenger 604 to Execujet's European fleet of two Learjet 45s and two 60s, one 604 and three Global Expresses.

ExecuJet Europe managing director Peter Smales says the takeover represents "phase one" of an expansion plan that will see the company acquire or open businesses in "a northern and central European arc from the UK through Scandinavia to the Baltic states". He hinted at a further announcement in a "month or so", adding: "We're fairly far down the line."

ExecuJet has operating bases at Copenhagen, London Stansted and Zurich, and a maintenance centre near the Danish capital.

Smales says the German market, the fourth largest in the world, is "extremely important" to the company's expansion plans.

Jet Connection, founded in 1997 by Rainer Wenz, and based at Frankfurt Main airport, will be rebranded as ExecuJet, but Smales says this will be done in a "managed" way as the company "has a good client base and brand recognition and we don't want to do anything to upset that".

Wenz will remain with ExecuJet in an advisory capacity "during an agreed period of transition", while chief operating officer Georg Biesing, who has been with Jet Connection since its start, will take over as chief executive.

The acquisition adds Jet Connection's German air operator's certificate (AOC) to Execujet's Swiss and Danish AOCs, making it easier for it to operate cabotage services in the European Union.

ExecuJet Europe manages a fleet of 50 aircraft, 13 of which are available for charter. It is also the Bombardier dealer in Switzerland and Scandinavia and a distributor for the Pilatus PC-12.

Parent ExecuJet Aviation has operations in Dubai, Johannesburg and Sydney.

Smales says the company, which bought fixed-base operator (FBO) Zimex Flight Support last year (Flight International, 2-8 September 2003), is keen to open more FBOs, probably in Germany and central Europe. But he says any acquisitions would "have to be linked to selling aircraft. This is our core business."

The company also wants to double the number of Global Express aircraft it manages from four to eight in the next three years.

DEVELOPMENT

Eviation set for power selection

Eviation Jets is poised to select the powerplant for its twin-engined revamp of the Vantage business jet. The choice of engine, likely to be the Williams FJ33, may be announced at October's National Business Aviation Association Convention in Las Vegas, a year after Eviation acquired the intellectual property of former Vantage owner VisionAire. Eviation owner and chief executive Matt Eller says Vantage flight testing, development and manufacture will be based "outside the USA to keep to keep overhead costs low".

The Ames, Iowa-based company is in the final stages of negotiations with potential partners. Eller is also in talks with private investors to help fund development of the six-seat aircraft. "I am committed to bringing the Eviation Vantage to market," he says. "As proof, I have and will continue to put my own money into this programme."