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MARKET

Polish aviation market

Construction
and Infrastructure

Lower Silesia Region



Radex Corporation

managerial success of
Janusz Sobieraj



Polish Supercluster

Black Hawk Sikorsky S-70i helicopters, and components for the latest Boeing 787 Dreamliner, F-16 fighters, Airbus A380 and Eurocopter are the most spectacular examples of products manufactured at the Aviation Valley cluster in Poland. "This year we will keep the sales level at USD1.5 billion," says Andrzej Rybka, Director of the Aviation Valley Association.

The Aviation Valley in south-eastern Poland has already developed to become a powerful cluster for the design and manufacture of helicopters, airplanes and aircraft components for global aviation giants including Boeing, Airbus, Eurocopter and Latecoere. The cluster brings together businesses operating in the aviation sector in three provinces in south-eastern Poland, mainly in Podkarpackie province with the capital city Rzeszów. At the beginning of the decade, when the cluster was established, it was composed of 18 companies providing employment to 9,000 people. Today there are 90 companies in the cluster and they employ 23,000 employees with the highest qualifications.

According to Andrzej Rybka, the Aviation Valley owes its success to its excellent staff. With more than 70 years of experience in aircraft production, a high technical culture had developed in the area, making it possible for the local staff to embrace new technologies at a pace which won admiration and recognition from the world leading aviation firms investing in the Aviation Valley. This is how PZL Mielec embraced the technology provided by the US helicopter giant Sikorsky. The conversion of the PZL Świdnik helicopter manufacturing plant, after its acquisition by Agusta Westland, to meet the needs of the Italian-British investor, is going on at a similar fast pace. The turbocharger plant of BorgWarner Turbo Systems of the United States and a subsidiary of MTU Aeroengines, a Bavarian aerospace giant, are already working at full steam. Another large aerospace corporation, Goodrich, is doing business in the city of Krosno and is going to build more manufacturing plants in the cluster. "Millions will be invested in the Aviation Valley in the near future," says Andrzej Rybka. "Interest in our cluster is not declining."

But the Aviation Valley does not rely for its future on foreign investors alone. Of special significance is collaboration between the aviation industry and the research sector. The Centre for Advanced Technologies Aeronet - Aviation Valley has been set up for this purpose. It brings together businesses operating in the cluster and 11 universities of technology and scientific institutes that conduct research needed for the development of technologies used by the aviation industry.

Collaboration with the universities also has an educational dimension. The universities train new staff with the

highest qualifications for the needs of the aviation industry. The Rzeszów University of Technology, with its Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Aeronautics, plays a leading role in this respect. It is at the top of the education pyramid built by the Aviation Valley. Secondary schools make up its lower level. There are already 12 secondary vocational schools in Podkarpackie province sponsored by the Aviation Valley, which offers consultation for the teachers and assistance in equipping their labs and modernising their curricula. The schools also receive assistance from European Union sources under the Regional Operational Programme.

This comprehensive efforts to create suitable conditions for the aerospace industry have attracted wide interest from global manufacturers operating in the sector. In order to respond to this interest, the Aviation Valley organises trade missions to France, Germany and the United States, and seeks promotion at all important aerospace industry exhibitions. The results of these activities are increasingly evident. However, the Aviation Valley looks not only at distant countries to develop its initiatives. The economic slowdown in almost all countries prompted the Aviation Valley to look for streamlining opportunities, reserves and an additional potential for expansion. These were found in a Slovak automotive cluster. Due to the crisis of the automotive industry, Slovak companies turned their interest to the aviation sector. The production and cooperation potential of the Slovak plants which are potential

partners for Polish aviation companies is now being analysed. Many of them have modern numerically controlled manufacturing equipment and staff trained to work with modern technologies. It quickly turned out that the technical university in the Slovak city of Žilina may be an excellent partner for the Rzeszów University of Technology. And Slovak manufacturers of ultralight aircraft may become partners for small Aviation Valley companies which produce general aviation aircraft. The designer of the Slovak companies' flagship export product, the Dynamic aircraft, is a Pole living in Slovakia.

But Andrzej Rybka stresses the aviation community are not the only people behind the success of the Aviation Valley. "A great role is played by awareness on the part of the authorities, especially the authorities of Podkarpackie province and the Rzeszów municipality, as well as growing numbers of local residents that the development of the aviation industry has become a chance for the development of the region as a whole," Andrzej Rybka says. "Thanks to this, we are ceasing to be, or actually have already ceased to be 'Poland B' [as the less developed eastern part of Poland is traditionally called - ed.]. One can fly from the Rzeszów airport directly to many countries. Foreign investors are interested in us. It makes sense to receive education from our schools and this education is at the highest level. At the same time, we have an industry able to co-exist with our splendid natural environment and create a high quality of life."