



# Klas Act

ATM magazine met with Jan Klas of the Czech Republic to discuss how this enterprising air navigation service provider is meeting the challenge of growth

**A**ir Navigation Services of the Czech Republic last year saw profits rise to nearly CZK 480 million (US\$22.2 million) on record sales topping CZK 4 billion driven mainly by significant growth in air traffic.

“The company’s results are reflecting the growing interest of airlines in our services. Our primary goal is to meet customers’ requirements for quality, capacity, cost effectiveness,” said Jan Klas, the chief executive of ANS CR.

Czech airspace was used by 837,000 aircraft last year, compared to 780,000 aircraft in 2015 and yet costs for navigation services have remained unchanged since 2009. Klas here discusses how the provider plans to maintain that level of performance.

**ATM Václav Havel Airport Prague is planning to build a new runway for parallel operations. You have already announced this is the reason why a new control tower must be built in Prague. What investment will this require?**

**JK** The new control tower is closely related to Prague Airport’s intention to build a parallel runway and an extension of Terminal 2. We are supporting these projects over the long term and their realisation will be a crucial step and a prerequisite for Prague to remain a major central European airport in the future. After all, its capacity at peak times, when there is the highest demand by airlines, is virtually exhausted.

The new control tower in Prague is needed to give controllers a panoramic view of both runways. It will therefore be 75 metres high, which is 30 metres higher than the existing one. According to preliminary estimates, its construction will cost about CZK 380 million and ANS CR will be able to finance that from its own resources.

**ATM What stage is the project at?**

**JK** We are currently working on drawing up specifications that will address the demands of a new control tower in all its

aspects, both from a user and security perspective. At the end of this year, the architectural design should be known, after having conducted a public tender to secure an architect and general designer.

The construction of the tower could start in 2021 and we expect it to be in operation in 2023. However, it will be related to how Prague Airport is progressing in developing the parallel runway project.

**ATM What will happen to the current control tower? Will it be demolished?**

**JK** The existing tower will remain at the airport and when the new tower has been completed, it will serve as a test and backup workplace.

**ATM The parallel track in Prague should have been built several years ago. Do you fear construction work will be delayed again?**

**JK** I hope it will not. After all, as I have already said, at Václav Havel Airport Prague,

demand at peak times is overtaking supply and without a parallel runway, this problem will not be solved.

There is an opinion that the parallel runway will only be needed if Aero Vodochody (the Czech aircraft manufacturer) does not open another international airport at Vodochody. I hope, this opinion has definitively been abandoned.

The construction of the control tower could start in 2021 and it is scheduled to enter into operation in 2023. With Aero, we have agreed to provide the necessary air traffic services for its airport although that will not start right away.

And when Aero finds its place within the air transport market, it will be to the benefit of both Prague and the Czech Republic. Our capital city could certainly support two airports. They should be able to prosper, a lot of capitals have even more airports.

**ATM While Prague’s airport is rapidly evolving, regional airports are far from showing such an increase in passenger numbers. Do you see any future for them?**

**JK** There is a need to maintain a network of regional airports. We provide navigation services to airports in Brno, Ostrava and Karlovy Vary and we would like to extend services to Ceske Budejovice where the airport has been modernised. It is important that the regions stimulate the development of all these airports which will always be a good base especially for charter flights.

**ATM Is there any ambition for remote tower development here?**

**JK** Air Navigation Services of the Czech Republic does not have direct experience with the implementation and use of remote tower technology yet, but we are closely monitoring the development of this product and we have a plan to use it for future projects.

Indeed, if we do succeed in securing the public tender for air traffic services at the airport in Ceske Budejovice, we will provide services using a remote tower, which I consider would be a pilot project in the use of this technology.

As part of civil and military integration, the intention is to develop a joint remote tower centre with the Czech military to provide air traffic services at airports with military traffic and to use it as a backup system for some airports where ANS CR already provides air traffic services.

**ATM The airspace of the Czech Republic saw increased traffic last year. Did that prove problematic for ANS CR?**

**JK** From a historical point of view, the airspace of the Czech Republic was the busiest it has ever been last year. We recorded a total of 853,420 movements, up two per cent more than the previous record year of 2016. This is a long term trend and traffic here is growing faster than in other parts of Europe. For us, it is more a challenge than a problem.

In Europe, we are one of the few air navigation service providers that did not cause any delay due to air traffic control services. We have not increased our charges to air carriers since 2009 in line with European legislation and in actual fact we are continually reducing them. Even so, Czech airspace continues to be attractive to airlines mainly due to its high levels of safety and sufficient capacity.

**ATM Does the traffic density require new measures to maintain safety?**

**JK** Traffic safety is a constant, and it must always remain high. All parameters show that we are doing well. There were no incidents in the Czech Republic last year that would endanger the safety of air traffic. However, it is clear that in the future, it will be possible to manage more and more traffic, regardless of national borders, within the Single European Sky project.

**ATM How many air traffic controllers do you currently employ?**

**JK** The number is increasing and we have 250 air traffic controllers today. We have a record number of controllers in training and we also use controllers from the regional airports - Brno, Ostrava and Karlovy Vary. We do not specify the target number as it will vary depending on air traffic needs.

**ATM Are you succeeding in expanding the commercial activities of ANS CR?**

**JK** As an air navigation service provider at the heart of Europe, ANS CR has always been active internationally and our commercial activities are - and I hope will certainly continue to be - instrumental in that.

ANS CR is doing well in securing contracts for ATC training where we benefit from over 30 years of domain knowledge and experience and which our customers appreciate. ATC training together with flight inspection services represent the backbone of our commercial services but at the same time we are evaluating other services which we can bring to the market in the future.

Our commercial activities have recently received more attention due to the successful training project for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Under this three-year contract, ANS CR is training the next generation of air traffic controllers for BiH in order for

their national provider BHANSA to be able to take over the upper airspace from the neighbouring countries in a few years’ time.

In addition to its importance for the region, the project, which is now entering its second year, is also providing a very interesting experience for us due to the fact that some parts of the training is carried out in Finland, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia.

Overall, I am very pleased that ANS CR is an attractive business partner for our clients and that new ones are showing genuine interest in co-operation such as Malta Air Traffic Services where contractual negotiations are underway.

**ATM How will ANS CR face the capacity challenge of demand growth within the central European region in the next, say, 10 years?**

**JK** This is of course a key question of our future strategic aim. According to the latest forecasts, the traffic demand in our region will continue to grow faster than the European average. The airspace, however, is not infinite and the forecast growth will also have an impact on the volatility of the service, e.g. to unexpected events. Some examples from the recent past are the Ukraine or Syria crises, which we have so far been able to handle exceptionally well.

Taking into consideration also the expected liberalisation of services, it is apparent that the environment will be challenging especially for the smaller and medium-sized air navigation service providers. ANS CR is not an exception and I strongly believe that we cannot face these challenges alone.

We would therefore like to establish ourselves as a strong regional partner within the well established co-operation of the FAB CE Functional Airspace Block. Other forms of industrial partnership could also represent promising options.

From my point of view the problem is not the technical solution of such regional co-operation, which we are able to develop and implement.

There are, however, still some legislative barriers, which have so far not been – despite the huge effort – addressed by the Single European Sky and other EU legislation. This includes, among others, the issues of common procurement or liability.

We are, however, seeking solutions at FAB CE level e.g. by establishing a common legal entity co-owned by the participating air navigation service providers. The entity enables joint procurement by its shareholders and opens other issues for discussion such as liability, common charging, capacity sharing, etc. **ATM**