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The director of Public Airports of Catalonia, Jordi Candela.

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Director of Airports of Catalonia

«Private air mobility is constantly increasing and this is leading to an 'uberization' of aviation»

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As part of the 20th Andorran Family Business Forum (EFA) held last week, the Director General of Public Airports of Catalonia, Jordi Candela, went to the Principality to present his vision on the evolution of air transport and a balance of Andorra-La Seu d'Urgell Airport after the first months of operation of the regular line with Madrid.

–How was the meeting in Soldeu?

–A round table was held organized by the EFA with the different representatives of the airport inspectors, among whom we stood out as managers and the operator Air Nostrum. It was a day to continue the previous monographic event on air mobility and also to specify the future actions and a balance on the first months of regular flights from Andorra-La Seu and Madrid.

–So, how has this line evolved so far?

–The management is highly satisfied with the route, which has been working very well in its first stage without any notable incidents. This was one of the main questions

at the time the regular route was opened, whether it was full or not. In this sense, we are talking about an average capacity of 70% which is quite positive compared to the Spanish average of airports with similar characteristics. These data need years of maturation and in Andorra-La Seu it has been achieved in a few months. It has achieved a clearly superior result in the world of state regional aviation.

–During the winter season it was expected to have a large influx on this route, but what about the spring months?

–This is one of the most surprising events at the airport, as a significant drop in passengers was expected after the winter season. However, it has been found that the influx has continued at similar levels during the spring season and, in fact, continues to hold up surprisingly.

–Do you think that air traffic is in line with the country's demand?

–In 2010 we only had one hangar in the facilities and now we have 14. Today, it is an international, commercial airport, with based companies and, in fact, we are in the middle of a process of building a large

hangar. In total, it has gone from zero operations to 7,000.

–Still, could you get more information by talking in terms of activity?

–There is still an adjacent demand that can get more out of the airport. I think there is little knowledge about the services and benefits of this regular line. It seems that the public view only recalls failed projects such as Aviaco, which was only operational for three months. Sometimes negative memories weigh more heavily than new opportunities and positive numbers in the present.

–The destination of the flights is clearly oriented to the Principality, but what is the impact in the area of the Catalan Pyrenees?

–The Air Nostrum route is clearly promoted by the Government of Andorra and the main destination is the Principality. However, there is a destination in La Cerdanya and Alt Urgell, there is also a market in this area. Of course, I would not dare to put a percentage, which is clearly lower in the Andorran market. In addition to the commercial influx, we can also talk about other types of services that are aimed at Ca-



«The Air Nostrum route is aimed at Andorra, but there is also an active market in the Cerdanya and Alt Urgell counties»

talan domestic traffic. In this sense, it should be noted that we have a heliport to attend to critical emergency medical services throughout the Alt Urgell area and based companies, apart from the existing private traffic.

–So, do you think that is a dynamizing element?

–Clearly. It is a great engine that creates synergies with all the adjacent territories. I think it's a great opportunity. As an example, Girona airport was an element that, in principle, had low cost operators in which the majority destination was Barcelona, but thanks to this the city became known in Europe. It is a process of symbiosis; If Andorra benefits, Catalonia will do the same because it is a track that can connect anywhere in Europe.

–And what can you tell me about the evolution of private aviation?

–Private air traffic is increasing. From having one day a week of weekly activations, we've gone to four or five, in addition to the Air Nostrum Friday and Sunday line.

–How far do you think this sector can go?

-Private air mobility is constantly increasing and this is leading to an uberization of aviation.

-What does it mean?

-I mean that progress is inevitable. If a few years ago it was thought impossible for an on-demand ground transportation system to materialize, why not to do the same with private air mobility? Using a mobile application, depending on demand and destination, a reasonable price could be reached with private jets and the basis could be created to establish new businesses. Maybe the prices would be high, but not prohibitive. After all, it's about moving resources to connect people and end destinations, but there's nothing like it at the moment, although studies and projects are not lacking to develop an application.

-And wouldn't that be more oriented towards large airport areas?

-On the contrary. I think the main goal would be to adapt better to small groups for smaller airports, as it is more difficult to adapt to large areas. Putting it into practice is the best way to verify its functionality; much more effective than surveys, even if it ends up being a failure. However, as an idea for the future to be implemented at Andorra-La

Seu d'Urgell Airport, it is not so crazy.

-In comparative terms, in which airport do you see more future, in La Seu or Alguaire?

-They are different surfaces with diversified objectives. On the one hand, the Cathedral is a niche facing a public service opportunity, clearly aimed at promoting tourism in the Principality and the Pyrenees. On the other hand, in Alguaire we find a platform focused on innovation and the industrial field, in which training and internships are very important. There is no room for this in the Cathedral, so two different units cannot be compared.

-In relation to the flight diversion to Alguaire due to the high temperatures. How did the protocol change develop?

-At the time the commercial operation of the airport was approved, conditions and technical bases were set based on tests that were previously carried out taking into account the characteristics of the aircraft and the runway, and one of the conditions is 30 degrees. As this was an innovative maneuver at the airport, these measures were implemented to preserve the sa-



«I rely more on aircraft development than on runway remodeling»

«The structure of the Schengen area was completed five years ago; the only factor needed is political will»

fety of everyone. However, this is an outdated regulation that does not affect modern devices and is already updated to a limit of up to 37 degrees. We have been calling for this measure to be lifted for two months, but we are always working more proactively from compromised situations.

-Are any upgrades planned for the future to diversify services or to accommodate other types of aircraft?

-We are working on several projects. Lengthening the track is tricky. Doubtful million-dollar investments are needed, which must be profitable in the medium term. But above all, because of the environmental issue. The impact of a long track on a natural area such as Alt Urgell is essentially not at all convenient.

-So which way would you go for the development of the airport?

-I would rather rely on the evolution of aircraft than on facilities. While it is true that more and more sustainable construction is needed in terms of airport surfaces, I believe it is essential to optimize jets, commercial aircraft and helicopters to achieve better results.

-What are these projects?

-We have recently awarded the work on the beaconing of the runway so that night flights can be carried out for the coming winter and a new large hangar.

-What new connections do you think would benefit the influx of travelers?

-I think that with the Madrid line we have the door open to the whole world indirectly. We've had flights from the Headquarters to Argentina and New York via the Spanish capital and that's great value.

-As an expert, do you see the construction of an airport in Andorra as viable?

-Engineering is capable of everything if there is desire and resources. However, it remains to be seen what profitability and environmental impact it will have. I find it very complicated, as it would require an investment of hundreds of millions of euros with reduced demand.

-What about the Schengen area?

-The structure has been ready for five years for passport control and detention. What is needed is the political will, which I know is not materializing. ≡

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