

'Make in India' drives positive vibes among German aerospace majors



Volker Thum
Managing Director, BDLI

German Aerospace Industries Association (BDLI) is the primary industry representative for the aerospace sector in Germany. Representing more than 230 companies, BDLI engages in dialogue with political institutions, authorities, trade associations and governments at home and abroad. Volker Thum, Managing Director of BDLI, has over 25 years of active experience in the aerospace industry. Before taking up the chief executive role at BDLI, he was the head of the Airbus plant in Bremen, the second largest Airbus location in Germany. Prior to that, he held senior positions in their Toulouse, Stade and Hamburg facilities. In this interview with Aeromag, Thum talks about the German leadership in Aerospace industry, long-standing and successful Indo-German alliances, and the prospects for Indian aerospace manufacturers.

As the primary representative of the aerospace sector in Germany, what does the BDLI showcase as the best, or most positive features in the industry, while you speak of innovation and cutting-edge technologies?

Germany is at the cutting edge of aerospace technology. One out of every six new passenger aircraft produced globally is being delivered

in Germany to airlines from around the world. Moreover, every new aircraft built anywhere in the world contains German technology, which highlights the technological advances of our supplier industry. Similarly, our country is home to leading manufacturers in satellite technology, military aviation, engines and helicopters. In short: thanks to innovation, Germany is one of the leading aerospace nations in the world.

How is the current state of play and overall performance of the aerospace sector in Germany—in terms of economic growth, sales, exports, employment etc?

Our sector has gone from strength to strength over the past 20 years thanks to 65 billion Euros that have been invested in research and technology. Employment and sales are at record



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levels, and exports go from strength to strength. For instance, Airbus will soon inaugurate a fourth assembly line for its bestselling A320 family in Hamburg. MTU, soon to be followed by Rolls-Royce, once again assembles commercial aircraft engines in Germany. A large proportion of these products is being exported to all corners of the world.

Among the various categories—Aviation and Aerospace Systems, Engines, Equipment, Material Science and Components—which are the thrust areas that your expert panels would be focusing on in the present context?

All of them! And I would add UAVs. You can't have one without the others. We are lucky to have a closely-knit research network that spans companies, research institutes, universities and start-ups that work in all of these fields. For us it is really about creating and fostering an aerospace cluster in Germany that helps shape the future of the industry.

With valuable insights from your involvement in the high-profile international platform, ILA Berlin Air Show, what advantages do you see in taking part in Aero India 2017?

Germany is India's main trading partner in the EU. Economic relations between our two countries have intensified markedly in recent years. This is especially true of the aerospace industry. Our sector has a long-standing and successful partnership with India and recognized the great potential of the Indian aerospace sector very early

on. For instance, Airbus aircraft form a significant part of the fleets of all major Indian carriers with a market share of well over 70%. Airbus is India's aircraft of choice. With this in mind, it might not come as a surprise that German companies are strongly attracted by Aero India. This year, a total of 11 companies will be united under the roof of the German Pavilion in hall C 3.1. Another seven will be having individual displays.

What is the feedback from the German aerospace majors and other players who are involved at so many levels in the aerospace and defence industry in India?

It is very positive, driven mainly by the 'Make in India' initiative. Airbus, for instance, works with over 45 Indian suppliers, both publicly and privately owned, who employ over 6,000 people on their projects. In 2015, Airbus exceeded the \$500 million annual procurement mark from Indian suppliers.

What's the range of product profiles and manufacturing groups that are interested in the region? What do you have to offer us?

A number of German companies are very active in India. For instance, Liebherr Aerospace, one of the leading suppliers to the large manufacturers, produces nose wheel steering systems, landing gear actuators and flap actuation systems for the Dornier 228 to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. The company has also set up a supplier platform in India for gearboxes.

To give you another example: The German Aerospace Center supports the Indian power provider NTPC in its project to establish a research centre to test and develop solar power plants and their components.

Your investment in R&D is pretty high at the domestic front, how about your R&D centres out here?

It's happening more and more, thanks to the excellent education available at India's leading universities and great talent pool. To give you one example, Airbus' global Emerging Technologies and Concepts Group (ETC) is headquartered in Bengaluru, where Airbus employs around 400 engineers.

The group focuses on emerging and disruptive technologies. Additionally, Airbus has two dedicated design centres, each employing more than 200 engineers. And a branch of the Airbus BizLab, which brings together start-ups and Airbus 'intrapreneurs', was recently established in Bengaluru.

What are the prospects for SMEs, system manufacturers etc. in building partnerships—what is the scope for tie-ups on a bilateral level?

The prospects are positive, no doubt. A number of Indian suppliers and technology companies already work closely with the German aerospace industry. In a way, that's one reason why we are at Aero India, to build those partnerships.

AIR SHOWS & DEFENCE EXHIBITIONS

- * February 14-18, Aero India 2017, Bangalore, India
- * February 19-23, IDEX, Abu Dhabi
- * 28 Feb – 5 March, Avalon 2017, Australian Airshow, Melbourne
- * March 21-15, LIMA Airshow 2017, Langkawi, Malaysia,
- * May 9-12, IDEF, International Defence Industry Fair, Istanbul, Turkey
- * May 16-18, IMDEX ASIA 2017, Singapore
- * May 15-17, Airport Show 2017, DICEC, Dubai
- * June 19-25, Paris Airshow 2017, Paris
- * August 15-20, MAKS 2017, Russian Airshow, Moscow
- * November 12-16, Dubai Airshow, DWC, Dubai
- * February 6-11, Singapore Airshow 2018, Singapore



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