

Poland Is First In Europe To Get Dreamliner Plane

Vanesa Gera, Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Poland's national airline LOT welcomed its first Boeing 787 "Dreamliner" into its fleet Thursday, becoming the first European carrier to get the U.S. aircraft maker's newest plane.

The plane has been hailed for a state-of-the-art design that makes it more fuel efficient and comfortable for passengers than an earlier generation of aircraft, and many in this ex-communist country celebrated its arrival as a symbolic step in the country's speedy economic and technological development.

The tabloid Fakt declared the plane a "Technical miracle from America" in a front-page headline. "In Europe only Poland has such a super modern airplane," the paper boasted.

LOT has ordered eight in total, with the next four due to be delivered early next year.

Plans for the plane to land in Warsaw escorted by F-16 fighter jets were scrapped due to heavy fog. But the weather didn't stop people from gathering near Warsaw's international airport to get a glimpse of the jet.

The all-news station TVN24 devoted the morning to live coverage of its arrival as if it were a historic event. One couple interviewed by the station had traveled hundreds of kilometers (miles) to see the plane, and described being fascinated and moved.

Boeing delivered the plane to LOT airlines on Wednesday in the U.S. state of Washington, where Boeing's commercial planes division is headquartered. There a Polish priest blessed the plane with holy water. It then made the trans-Atlantic flight with four LOT pilots and two American instructors from Boeing. On the tarmac in Warsaw it was sprayed with water in a "traditional salute," LOT said.

Now it remains to be seen whether the upgrade to LOT's fleet will strengthen the business position of the struggling state-run company. LOT lost money last year, partly due to the high cost of fuel worldwide.

Aside from their fuel efficiency, which will lower operating costs, the Dreamliners could make LOT more attractive to potential investors as the company seeks a majority stakeholder, said Andrzej Halesiak, an economist with Bank Pekao SA in Warsaw who studies the airline industry.

Turkish Airlines had considered buying LOT but earlier this year decided against such a step.

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Having Dreamliners before other European airlines could help Warsaw become a regional transit hub for long-range routes to the United States, Canada and China, Halesiak said.

"The Dreamliner can help LOT to become more offensive in its strategy," Halesiak said. "It might attract passengers to LOT airlines."

LOT plans to fly its first Boeing 787 on short-haul flights in December in Europe. Early next year it will fly routes between Poland and New York, Chicago and Toronto.

Boeing says a total of 838 Dreamliners have been ordered worldwide. The company recently started to deliver the jets, with 36 handed over so far, after more than three years of delays.

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