



# AFRICAN AEROSPACE

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*Africa is coming up large on the radar at Turkish Technic, the fast-growing and ambitious maintenance arm that grew out of Turkish Airlines. The MRO operation sees new opportunities to develop its own style of strategic partnerships to the advantage of everyone concerned, reports Chuck Grieve.*

# TECH TO HEART

It makes sense to have a strong presence in Africa. That's the view of Dr Ismail Demir, chief executive of Turkish Technic. For Demir, the man who has been presiding over the expansion of Turkey's independent maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) operation since 2006, the indicators suggest the time is ripe for a discreet continental advance.

Turkish Airlines, the one-time parent and still major customer of Turkish Technic, has great ambitions in Africa and wherever it goes, it needs to be supported technically. Moreover, the ageing fleets of the continent's own airlines have a big and growing requirement for servicing. And, on top of that, with its economic environment opening up, Africa is of increasing importance to Turkey as a source of trade partners.

But Demir is not rushing in. "First we have to get our name known as a reliable partner," he said, "then we can base our strategy on this relationship."



The Turkish Technic approach to Africa is long-term and has three strands: joint operation of MRO facilities; technical support and training; and the provision of design and component services.

Demir said the company has an open mind on the kind of joint activity it will entertain. "We could become involved in joint MRO activity, or just consultancy in building hangars – particularly greenfield projects – and transferring our expertise. We've brought many new hangars online recently."

The kind of relationship that Turkish Technic is looking for will benefit from a little "warming up" so, to that end, the company is prepared to offer free consultancy to consider ideas for collaboration with prospective partners.

He said the company is looking to develop opportunities first in north and central Africa, where it has contacts. The activity is not all one way, however, and Demir claimed that "many airlines" are approaching Turkish Technic for

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2020 Vision:  
Dr. Ismail Demir

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discussions on a variety of projects. Some approaches are connected to Turkish Airlines activity but many are not.

With 36 destinations in 24 countries in Africa, Turkish Airlines has one of the widest networks on the continent. It has a variety of partnership arrangements with local companies for line services. In many cases, the airline's demands stretch available resources, creating opportunities for what is essentially still its sister organisation, Turkish Technic, to fly in qualified personnel.

To cope with the accelerated growth of the airline, the MRO organisation is in the midst of an extensive hiring and training programme. The plan, said Demir, is to send Turkish-trained mechanics to establish line maintenance bases at key points on the Turkish Airlines system.

Turkish Technic uses a partnership model successfully in its home market for engine repair and overhaul, component design and the manufacture of seats and aircraft interiors; the latter through a joint venture named TCI. For the African market, said Demir, the company is in the process of establishing new manufacturing companies concentrating on galleys and cabin interiors. "It's a good market for us," he said. Turkish Technic's expertise covers both new aircraft and refurbishments.



Over a third of the total African fleet is more than 20 years old. There are numerous examples of older aircraft that require refurbishment and upgrading to current standards. The facilities to do this work for the most part do not exist in Africa, forcing operators to seek appropriate services in the west.

In addition, Boeing forecasts that the African civil fleet will grow by 900 aircraft in 20 years, doubling its size – and Turkish Technic is aiming for a share of that market, at least in the transition phase. The company knows from experience that it is unlikely to be a limited market.

"Refurbishment will be important for the time being," said Demir. "We observed this in the Russian market a few years ago, when older aircraft were undergoing a transition to western-style components. The market was not as big as some analysts thought.

"We expect it to be similar in Africa. Airlines have older versions of western aircraft. Some will need maintenance and overhaul; some will need total refurbishment. It's not a long-term market. You can't base a strategy on this."

In parallel, the component capabilities that Turkish Technic has built up over many years with extensive investment, particularly in narrow-body aircraft, places the company in a strong position to serve local needs through partnerships. "This includes logistics," said Demir. "We can provide some consignment



**Habom:** It has the capacity to handle 11 narrow-body and three wide-body aircraft simultaneously.

**Left:** Turkish Technic says there is no shortage of personnel willing to man new MRO bases.

inventory in our partners' bases to provide for their requirements and benefit them."

He said the company has signed agreements in a number of countries but declined to elaborate. Talks are in progress on many fronts, and this appears to be forcing Turkish Technic to walk a political tightrope. "Decisions must be very carefully made," he said, "and shouldn't upset someone else."

It seems each country wants a state-of-the-art MRO facility that will become a service hub for the whole continent. And, despite the 1999 Yamoussoukro Decision, by which the 44 signatory countries agreed to liberalise intra-African air transport and coordinate activities, restrictive practices remain in place. "Everyone has their own ambitions," observed Demir.

For its part, Turkish Technic's willingness to take on the challenges of difficult and low-margin areas set it apart from the western competition. Despite the risks of some of the postings – a Turkish Airlines employee was killed last December in a burglary at the airline's

offices in Tripoli – Turkish Technic is "not short of people willing to go to trouble spots", he said.

But usually the Turkish airline and MRO operator are warmly greeted in Africa. This welcome extends to approaches by countries inviting the Turkish companies to undertake joint commercial activities.

Flexibility is an important attribute. In countries where Turkish Technic has long-standing relationships, including Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Angola, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, the nature of its arrangements is different.

"We want to build a good reputation for long-term relationships," said Demir. "So we plan to build good stations, provide good technical and component services, and train their people.

"Success in Africa will be based on long-term partnerships. There will be a period when we provide services to our partners as customers. Meanwhile, we will be training their people, developing their resources. That makes sense for both parties. It's better for logistics, HR, and is more cost-effective in long term."

Ideally, he said, Turkish Technic would like to start training its partners' personnel as soon as possible, especially with practical, on-the-job experience at Turkish Technic's facilities in Istanbul.

"We don't mind if our partners do their own work in the long term. We don't see this as losing a market. We can take our service to a different level with design and components. We're on this journey together."