'Outlook starting to brighten' for aviation, Airbus CEO says

November 15 2021, by Mathieu Rabechault

An Airbus A350 XWB aircraft performs a demonstration flight at the 2021 Dubai Airshow in the Gulf emirate on November 15, 2021.

The global aviation sector has begun to emerge from the Covid pandemic, its worst-ever crisis, and the "outlook is starting to brighten", Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury told journalists Monday.

A large order of 255 of Airbus' single-aisle A231 planes announced Sunday at the Dubai Airshow "completely justifies" a shift to ramping up manufacturing, the CEO said, predicting production of long-haul planes could pick up by the second half of the decade.

On Monday, US Air Lease signed a letter of intent for 111 Airbus aircraft, the manufacturer said.

Faury spoke to journalists, including AFP, on the sidelines of the Dubai Airshow. The following is a summarised and translated version of his comments in French:

Has the airline sector recovered?

"The crisis was very brutal, lasting 15 months at its worst stage. We are in the process of emerging, we can see aerial traffic recovering, the reopening of travel lines, the planes travelling here to Dubai were full or nearly full.

"The United States has largely resumed, Europe is also resuming. Asia will probably take a little longer, but globally the figures point to a recovery in the global economy and air traffic.

"When we say we are on the way out of the crisis, it is because we are coming back from the low point, we are progressively climbing back up.

"Airbus began the gradual recovery some months ago on short and medium-haul aircraft, the A320 family, but not on long-haul aircraft.

"We continue to believe that we can return to 2019-level air traffic at some point between 2023 and 2025—regionally likely in 2023 and internationally in 2025.

"We are much more optimistic because the outlook is starting to brighten.

"We can see from yesterday's order that the airlines are also starting to look to the horizon and prepare for a post-crisis situation."

Is the order for 255 A321 a sign?

"We quickly understood in 2020 that airlines and charter companies did not want to make decisions during the crisis that would have had too great of an impact on their future growth and their ability to remain key players.

"At the start of 2021, I said that I was not expecting big orders in 2021 and they would come in 2022.

"There are exceptions that prove the rule. We are in discussion with several players that are positioning themselves more quickly than others.

"We are in a recovery scenario that is not very different from what we had imagined.

"This confirms that the value of access to aircraft production is very important for the big players in aviation."

Will the order reassure other manufacturers?

"It completely justifies the ramp-ups we are anticipating.

"We are in the process of determining whether a ramp-up in the production to 70 and 75 will go on," he said referring to the number of new A320 and A321 aircraft per month in the summer of 2025.

"For the entire supply chain, it is a difficult moment, but (the ramp-ups) are clearly an opportunity.

"We think that for the second half of the decade, it is quite probable that what is happening with medium-haul aircraft will happen with long-haul aircraft because there will have seen five or six years of very weak deliveries.

"Many planes have been placed in long-term storage, some of which will be retired, which will create a deficit of new, high performance, fuel-efficient planes.

"Therefore, it is likely that there will be a strong ramp-up of long-haul aircraft at some point during the second half of the decade."

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