

'Momentum grows' for C Series as Europe weighs in to help its fight against threat of US levies



The Bombardier C Series

By Margaret Canning

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Bombardier's C Series programme is "gaining momentum" following a deal with EgyptAir with another African customer tipped to sign up, an aviation industry analyst has said.

It comes as the European Commission vowed to support the UK in its fight against potential US tariffs on the C Series, the wings of which are made in Belfast.

And the Belfast workforce of the Canadian-owned manufacturer received a further boost from an order for two Q400 turboprops to be flown by an airline in Kenya.

The deal with Nordic Aviation Capital - which will lease the aircraft to Jambojet in Kenya - was announced at the Dubai Airshow yesterday.

The Belfast team designs and manufactures the wing-mounted flight components for the Q400 turboprop, while around 1,000 of its 4,000 workforce makes wings for the C Series.

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Fred Cromer, president of Bombardier Commercial Aircraft, said: "The demand for turboprop aircraft worldwide is tremendous and the Q Series aircraft are ideally positioned to meet the needs of regional airlines as they offer a unique ability to serve diverse and challenging environments."

And this week, IraqiAir has also firmed up a 2013 deal to buy five CS300s, the larger of the two planes in the C Series programme.

However, the ambitious C Series programme suffered a setback in September when it was slapped with tariffs of up to 300% by US trade authorities.

But it's now hoped that a tie-in between Bombardier and Airbus announced last month will enable Bombardier to circumvent the impact of the tariffs.

Ernie Arvai of airinsight.com said EgyptAir's deal for up to 24 jets, announced at this week's airshow, signalled deepening confidence in the narrow-bodied passenger jet.

An unnamed European airline signed up to buy up to 61 C Series last week.

EgyptAir is the second African airline to sign up - and Mr Arvai said the industry rumour mill suggested a third airline from the continent will soon sign on the dotted line.

He said: "While clearly both of these negotiations began long before the Airbus takeover of the programme, each closed after the programme was acquired."

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"With Airbus now in the programme, any threats of Bombardier facing future financial difficulties or the programme not being well supported over the longer term have evaporated, increasing the comfort level of airlines with the programme.

"This bodes quite well for the future of the programme, as these orders help build the backlog to justify increasing production and reaching the levels of success initially forecast. The impact of Airbus association with the program is subtle, but deep."

And he added that airinsight.com now forecast a "positive future" for the Belfast Bombardier plant.

Meanwhile, according to the Financial Times, the European Commission has hit out at the US move to impose tariffs on the C Series.

The commission vowed to help the UK fight the case - and was insisting that the proposed duties had no basis in law.

According to the Financial Times, an EU source has said Brussels intervened "to defend both the Belfast plant and aerospace suppliers across Europe that stood to be affected by the US crackdown".

Belfast Telegraph

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