AIRBUS HELICOPTERS BREAKS GROUND ON FIRST HELICOPTER ASSEMBLY LINE IN CHINA

News / Business aviation, Manufacturer

Airbus Helicopters is moving forward with the expansion of its global footprint and its strategic partnership with China, as construction is now underway for its H135 Final Assembly Line (FAL) – the first of its kind not only for Airbus Helicopters, but also for the Western helicopter industry in China.

The FAL will be located in Qingdao, Shandong Province, eastern China, and construction is expected to be completed by 2018. A framework agreement signed in June 2016 calls for 100 H135s to be assembled over the next 10 years, and the first aircraft roll-out from Qingdao is planned for mid-2019. The FAL will have a total annual capacity of 18 H135 helicopters, which could be extended for future growth.

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“This ground breaking is a remarkable milestone for Airbus Helicopters’ global footprint and demonstrates our commitment to further enhancing our industrial cooperation with China’s rapidly growing aviation industry,” said Guillaume Faury, CEO of Airbus Helicopters. “We are confident that this project will achieve a win-win solution to fulfil the requirements of local customers while supporting the development of crucial helicopter services for the benefit of Chinese citizens.”

The new facility, located in Jimo Provincial Hi-Tech Industrial Development Zone, will be jointly operated by Airbus Helicopters and Qingdao United General Aviation Company Limited (UGAC), a joint venture between China Aviation Supplies Holding Company (CAS) and Qingdao United General Aviation Industrial Development Company Limited (UGA). Following the joint venture agreement signed in April of this year, Airbus Helicopters holds a majority share of 51%.

“The H135 Final Assembly Line is another strong example of Sino-European cooperation and will play an important role in further promoting the development of China’s general aviation industry,” said Mr. Li Hai, President of CAS. “We believe in this partnership and are looking forward to seeing the first Airbus helicopter assembled in China to fly in the skies.”

The H135 is one of the most popular light twin-engine helicopters in China, mainly operating in helicopter emergency medical services (HEMS), search and rescue, law enforcement, firefighting and tourism. To date, more than 1,200 helicopters of the H135 family are in operation around the globe with more than 4 million flight hours.

For the first time in 2016, China became Airbus Helicopters’ largest civil market in terms of annual bookings. Given the rapid development of the HEMS, public services and offshore wind industry in the country, a potential demand of 600 light twin-engine helicopters is expected over the next two decades.

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