

In 1994 an experienced businessman called Nicolae Petrov founded Moldavian Airlines (2M/MDV), based in Chisinau, the Moldavian capital city. Five years later he expanded his business to neighbouring Romania where he started up Carpatair (V3/KRP). This airline has its administrative offices in Bucharest, but decided that Timisoara was the better location for flight operations and maintenance. Nearly ten years later both airlines are still totally owned to the founder Nicolae Petrov.

Moldavian Airlines was the first private aviation enterprise in this former Soviet republic and initially used a pair of leased Ukrainian Yak 42s for services from Chisinau to Moscow Domodedovo airport. Domodedovo offered the best connections at that time to other former Russian republics including Siberia. Thanks to earlier excellent business relations demand was high for these connections but the demand dropped within months and the Yak 42s were replaced only a year later by smaller Yak 40s. A re-worked ex-Soviet Air Force Tu-134A (a former Tu-135 with long antennas at the tail) was added in 1996 with one of the Yak 42s returning to the airline for a resumption of Yak42 flights to Moscow, this time also serving Vnukovo airport. At that time the acceptance of Russian aircraft types on scheduled services did

TWO COUNTRIES - TWO AIRLINES - ONE STRATEGY



with representatives of Crossair (Switzerland) - a multiple distinguished market leader and an example to a number of regional carriers. A lease-contract was quickly signed for two Saab 340s which were replaced by sister-ships during heavy overhauls. This foundation-stone for the fleet-policy is still valid today. But it was not just aircraft that Crossair provided. In addition Moldavian Airlines copied and implemented major parts of the company-philosophy. The airline is now also engaged in the charter business and they serve well known destinations like Antalya, Lisbon or

340s.

Carpatair was founded in 1999 as the Romanian sister-company using the license of the less successful VEG Air which had started up a year before. The administrative base is in Bucharest but prior to start-up the management agreed a policy of non-competition with Tarom and decided therefore on Timisoara as an operating base. This rising industry metropolis is still the base today and became the hub for the airline offering the platform to operate niche routes with small aircraft not offered by bigger carriers. The inauguration flight took place in March 1999 from Cluj to Treviso in Italy, followed by the first domestic route from Cluj to Bucharest. Thanks to historical connections and the out-sourcing demand of the car supplies companies in Italy the network to Italy expanded significantly with services to Rome, Florence, Ancona, Bologna, Verona, Treviso and Bergamo with most destinations served a couple of times per week including several served twice daily. In the year 2000 both bases, Timisoara and Chisinau, were connected with double flight frequencies each working day. A single rotation each is offered on the weekend. The hub in Timisoara today offers connections to the domestic destinations Cluj, Sibiu, Bacau, Iasi and Oradea with minimum connecting times of 20 to 30 minutes copying the successful Eurocross concept of Crossair at Basle. The latest expansion concentrates on Germany, where Munich and Stuttgart as the southern German capitals of the automobile industry are soon to be served twice daily. Like Moldavian Airlines Carpatair is using a fleet of Saab 340s which grew from the initial two aircraft to a fleet of six by last spring; in addition a Yak 40 is available as back-up. Additionally two Saab 2000s are leased from Swiss with another six aircraft to arrive by next spring. The continuous downturn of Swiss allows for interesting leasing-deals with an occupation rate of 70 per cent allowing for further expansion.

Apropos Swiss: Whilst the operations of this Crossair successor had been trimmed within months (!), in-flight services reduced to a minimum and with the highly successful and much loved hub in Basel closed, the famous Crossair service is still in good hands with both Moldavian Airlines and Carpatair. Their success confirms that they have chosen the right way. Their in-flight service closely resembles Crossair's. So much so in fact that it is only the different uniform which reminds you that you are travelling with a different airline. A new and spacious lounge for business travellers was opened recently at Timisoara airport which sometimes can hardly be used because of the short connection times. We may look forward to a bright future and interesting expansion for these niche-carriers which already co-exist and indeed compete in the world of the big airlines.



not produce any problems but the management realised quickly that a switch to Western aircraft types was a future requirement - not only for comfort but for reasons of economy. Moldavian business (and politics) saw its future in closer alignment to Western Europe. In step with this the airline re-drew its network plans with Budapest being the first major European capital to be served. This highly successful move now sees a double daily frequency serving Budapest. The noise restrictions agreed by European governments were moving ever closer now geographically as well and only a short time later the airline's management met

Debrecen at Lake Balaton but some more unusual destinations as well like Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan or Atyrau in Kazakhstan. The Tu-134 used is still the same aircraft acquired in 1996 but the interiors have been replaced by the Crossair style with comfortable and elegant blue leather seats. The aircraft belongs today to the Vichi Air Company but is used by both airlines. Since 1999 Moldavian Airlines is a Moldavian-Swiss joint-venture when it became a full IATA-member as well. And a year later the airline introduced its own Frequent Flyer programme with the fleet now numbering three Saab

