

7/6/2017

Q and A with Roberta Neri, chief executive officer of air traffic controller ENAV – POLITICO

POLITICO

About Cookies: POLITICO uses cookies to personalize and improve your reader experience. By using our website or by closing this message box, you agree to our use of cookies as described in our [cookie policy](#).



Q and A with Roberta Neri, chief executive officer of air traffic controller ENAV

7/6/2017

Q and A with Roberta Neri, chief executive officer of air traffic controller ENAV – POLITICO

The Italian government continues to own 53 percent and plays a ‘fundamental’ in the navigation provider

By **CATHY BUYCK** | 7/5/17, 4:11 PM CET

Italy’s air traffic control provider, ENAV, went public last year, and ever since, the discipline of a stock market listing has made it more efficient and more flexible, the company’s boss says.

Most of the world’s air navigation service providers (ANSPs) are government owned, although a few have been privatized. ENAV says it is the world’s first to have an initial public offering. The IPO on the Milan Stock Exchange was heavily oversubscribed, and the company was valued at €1.8 billion.

POLITICO spoke to ENAV’s CEO Roberta Neri on the sidelines of a roundtable discussion in Brussels on the need for a Single European Sky, a European Commission initiative to coordinate air traffic management across the bloc. Before joining the Italian air navigation services provider in June 2015, Neri held leading roles in the regulated utilities sector.

ENAV’s 4,500 employees handle some 1.8 million flights a year from the control towers of 45 airports and four area control centers.

Was ENAV’s privatization a success?

I believe it is a clear advantage. ENAV benefits from the increased flexibility brought by having its shares widely traded in the market. A listed ENAV has also materially strengthened its brand and reputation worldwide, opening up further growth opportunities. Most importantly, the IPO process equipped ENAV with best-in-class corporate governance policies, best practices and procedures that ensure the business is future proof. I’m thinking, for example, of procedures on internal dealing, related party transactions and release of sensitive information.

How do you combine providing a public service with delivering shareholder value?

ENAV operates in a regulated business with clear rules defined at European level characterized by a risk-sharing mechanism between us and airspace users [airlines]; this framework provides ENAV with a highly resilient and predictable business model. In addition, ENAV has a strong potential to expand its non-regulated business, especially internationally — for example, we are already present in several European, African and Asian countries where we provide consultancy services.

7/6/2017

Q and A with Roberta Neri, chief executive officer of air traffic controller ENAV – POLITICO

How much say does the Italian government still have in the running and management of ENAV?

The Italian state has always played a non-invasive but fundamental role. Today, the ministry of economy and finance maintains a 53.4 percent stake and I expect the government will continue to play the same discreet role while also benefiting of the new energies coming from the market. I think it is important to add that there are a number of safeguards in place to ensure that the Italian state maintains control of a critical and strategic public service like ours: the so-called golden powers held by the government ensure that any shareholding above 3 percent is immediately reported to the competent bodies which can request more information on the shareholders' intentions and, if unsatisfied, can block or impose limits on the share purchase.

What is your view of the Single European Sky (SES) project?

There are already two SES legislative packages in place, and they have allowed — some would argue forced — ANSPs to improve their performance, not only in terms of capacity, meaning the amount of flights which we can manage, but also in terms of safety and efficiency. The regulatory framework is in place and the key tools have been defined. Now action at all levels, European and national, is required to overcome the fragmentation and constraints in capacity and efficiency. We are investing some €100 million a year in new technology and infrastructure.

ENAV is full part of the SESAR Joint Undertaking, the public-private partnership that steers the research for the SES's technological innovations, and of the SESAR Deployment Manager, the organization that is coordinating the upgrading of Europe's air traffic management infrastructure. We do work with other ANSPs in Europe on technological innovations. One example is the cooperation with our French colleagues, the DSNA, in Coflight, the new generation flight data processing system.

Flight data processing systems are the heart of any air traffic management system, and in order to improve flight cost efficiency, optimize the airspace usage and reduce the environmental impact of aviation, a technological breakthrough is required in this domain. Coflight is designed to meet the SES and SESAR program objectives.

How important for you is a presence in Brussels?

Brussels nowadays is the heart of political life in Europe. Aviation is an important economic sector and that's why it is important for ENAV to be here, close to the EU institutions as well as all other actors in our sector. For example, the European Aviation

7/6/2017

Q and A with Roberta Neri, chief executive officer of air traffic controller ENAV – POLITICO

Safety Agency has an active office in Brussels and important bodies like SESAR JU and SESAR DM are based here.

Your background is not in aviation. What are your key impressions of the air traffic management (ATM) industry after two years?

One thing that struck me when I joined this industry is the strong degree of cooperation and partnership among ATM providers internationally with a view to develop the future of ATM together. Our partnership in Coflight and Aireon [responsible for the design, financing and deployment of the first global satellite surveillance services for air traffic control] represent just two examples of how we see the future: new technologies, new business models, strong partnerships.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.