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Comlux expands in Middle East

VIP charter operator Comlux is moving closer to its core Middle East customer base by signing a deal with Saudi Arabia's MAZ Aviation to base two of its Airbus business jets in the kingdom.

The Swiss company – the world's biggest Airbus corporate jet operator – will also in 2011 open its first fixed base operation, at Paris Le Bourget, in partnership with US FBO specialist Landmark Aviation.

They are the latest steps in an expansion sprint that has seen the Maltese-registered outfit in

the past two years move into completions with the acquisition of Indianapolis Jet Center and a 40% share in the Airbus completions business in Toulouse.

It has also grown its charter fleet to 13 aircraft, including five Airbuses – its latest, an A320, arrives for completion at the re-named Comlux Completions in Indianapolis in February. It privately manages three further aircraft. A Bombardier Challenger 605 will be delivered in March.

Comlux – which already co-owns the stake in the Airbus

completions facility with MAZ – will position one of its A319 ACJs and its A320 in the Gulf, where 70% of its charter business originates.

"Our biggest priority was to set up an alliance in the Saudi market," says chief executive Richard Gaona. "We wanted a reliable partner who knows the environment but we also wanted a base because empty legs are what kills this business. This way we are very well placed to offer a good price to our customers."

Although the oil-rich Gulf re-

mains a relatively recession-proof region for business aviation, particularly in the long-range, large-cabin segment, it is becoming more competitive, with start-up Al Jaber Aviation joining established Boeing Business Jet operator Royal Jet.

Gaona, however, is untroubled by the threat. "With the new competition, it will come down to who can deliver the best quality and level of service," he says.

Comlux – which operates a mostly Bombardier Global and

Challenger fleet in addition to the Airbuses – is also looking at Asia to lead the recovery. The company has an operating base in Almaty, Kazakhstan, where it plans to position one of its Global Expresses. "In 2010 this will be another emphasis of the business," says Gaona.

The Le Bourget FBO – a new building – is expected to open in March 2011 and will have a hangar able to accommodate up to an Airbus A340-600. "The FBO will be a new card in our range of services," says Gaona.