

THE VFW 614 FOKKER PROJECT AND THE ROMANIAN AERONAUTICAL INDUSTRY IN THE 1970^s

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***Abstract:** In a '70s meeting of the Socialist Republic of Romania's (RSR) Defense Council, Nicolae Ceausescu decided to have Romanians build a short-courier aircraft capable of ensuring passenger traffic, domestic and foreign, over short distances. Based on these indications, a contact was designed and several offers were obtained for the joint construction of such an aircraft: the British company "BAC" for an aircraft to be designed and developed at the request of the Romanian side, the British company "Hawker Siddeley, for the HS 748 aircraft, already manufactured in a military version, subject to obtaining the approval of the English government, the French company "SNIAS", for the Nord-262-Fragatte aircraft which did not meet the Romanian requirements and, finally, from the West German company VFW Fokker, initially for the F. 98 aircraft, manufactured in the Netherlands, and then for the VFW 614 aircraft, both of which were introduced in Bucharest in September 1972 and May 1973, respectively. In the following study, the evolution of the negotiations with the West German side and the causes of the final failure in taking over the VFW-614 model for Romanian domestic production are presented and analyzed.*

***Keywords:** plane, Romania, VFW-614, Fokker, Romanian-West German relations, espionage*

1. INTRODUCTION

In May 1970, in a meeting of the RSR Defense Council, Nicolae Ceaușescu decided to build in Romania a short-courier aircraft capable of ensuring passenger traffic, domestic and foreign, over short distances.

Based on these indications, a contact was made and several offers were obtained for the joint construction of such an aircraft: the company "BAC" from the United Kingdom for an aircraft to be designed and developed at the request of the Romanian side, the company "Hawker Siddeley", still from Great Britain, for the HS 748 aircraft, already manufactured a military version, subject to obtaining the approval of the English government, the company "SNIAS" from France, for the Nord-262-Fragatte aircraft which did not meet the Romanian requirements and, finally, from the West German company VFW Fokker for the F. 98 aircraft, manufactured in the Netherlands and then for the VFW 614 aircraft, both of which were introduced in Bucharest in September 1972 and May 1973 respectively [1].

2. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Due to the fact that the VFW 614 aircraft would be quieter, the only one in the class of short-haul aircraft featuring a turbo-jet engine and cargo transformation possibilities, for the needs of the military, negotiations began in 1973 with VFW-Fokker from RF Germany for cooperation in the manufacture of the VFW-614 aircraft [1].

By the agreement concluded on June 29, 1973 between the Bucharest Aeronautical Group and the company VFW-Fokker, the two parties agreed to cooperate in the manufacture and sale of the VFW-614 aircraft by setting up a joint venture for production and sales, based in Romania. Negotiations were cumbersome on both sides, showing distrust, numerous returns, delays, etc.

Consequently, only on July 2, 1977, the documents establishing the Romanian-West German joint venture were signed in Bucharest, with the main objective of manufacturing a series of 100 VFW-614 aircraft, of which 50 were to be sold to third parties [2].

Due to the high price of the aircraft manufactured in Germany (according to the data known to the Romanian authorities, the West German government subsidized 1.3 million marks each aircraft), as well as due to the financial difficulties of the company, the production of the aircraft was stopped in December 1977. As a result, the company was no longer able to meet the conditions for the joint venture to enter into force. Only two days after this decision, Constantin Stanciu from MCECEI and Schäffler H. from VFW Fokker signed the protocol "On the results of the negotiations of December 22-23, 1977 between the representatives of the Romanian government and VFW Fokker regarding the cooperation within the V.F.W. 614". Among other things, this protocol states that the partners of the joint venture "Romavia" have decided to develop a concept defining the means and ways to ensure the entry into force of the cooperation, taking into account the conditions modified by the decision of the federal government and the agreement to examine the continuation of the program by presenting appropriate commercial premises.

3. PROJECT ELABORATION AND CONTRIBUTORS

Constantin Stanciu and Mihai Pacepa participated in the elaboration of the concept, and the discussions with the West-German partner took place on January 12, 1978 in Bucharest. On this occasion, two options were discussed, namely: the development of simultaneous aircraft manufacturing in Bremen and in Romania, the development of single-line manufacturing in Romania. The West German company put a series of disadvantageous conditions on the Romanian side, some of them even accepted by Mihai Pacepa: guarantees to cover the production costs at VFW Fokker that could not be covered by sales, the purchase by TAROM of a number of aircraft etc.). Subsequently, the first option was abandoned and the discussions focused on the option of fully transferring the VFW 614 program to Romania, by purchasing the remaining parts and subassemblies, based on a contract with each company participating in the construction of the aircraft. However, they did not assume the role of sole supplier nor did they grant guarantees on the quality of the goods transferred to the Romanian side, remaining for the latter to assume the risk of the entire business.

The Romanian specialists consulted after the failure of Mihai Pacepa claimed that even if these parts and all the documentation had been purchased at a convenient price, without the support and guarantee of German designers or manufacturing companies, the plane could not be built on time or obtained certification flying. In fact, it was known to the Romanian side that all 16 planes built by VFW Fokker, model 614, had some technical shortcomings that the West German company had not been able to completely remove, due to the small production series.

The Federal Government, under the leadership of Chancellor H. Schmidt, has agreed to resume the manufacture of the aircraft in Germany, only if the German company VFW-Fokker will present appropriate commercial conditions and will not take additional risks, as the company also bears part of the losses resulting from stopping the VFW-614 program.

The protocol concluded with the German side on December 23, 1977, established a program for the development of a concept for further cooperation in the manufacture of this aircraft that takes into account, in addition to production needs for Romania, the wishes expressed by the US Federal Express for the purchase of modified VFW-614 aircraft.

Following the elaboration of the concept, the German company informed the Romanian side that Federal Express USA no longer wanted those planes and, as a result, in May 1978 the possibility of taking over the entire program to manufacture the VFW-614 exclusively in Romania was discussed.

The negotiations for the transfer of the aircraft production in Romania were conditioned by the company Fokker of direct negotiations between the Romanian side and each of the suppliers of components for this type of aircraft: with the company Fokker-Bremen for fuselage, equipment and general assembly, with the company Fokker-Amsterdam for the aircraft wing, with Messerschmitt-Bolkow-Blohm-Hamburg for the rear fuselage of the aircraft, with Fairey and Sabca-Belgium for spoilers, ailerons and flaps, with Rolls-Royce for the M-45 H engine that equipped this aircraft. There were a total of over 85 main equipment suppliers involved in the construction of the aircraft and with each Romanian side had to negotiate the acquisition of documentation and components.

At the end of 1978, there were no alleged external beneficiaries for this type of aircraft, although initially there were some concrete requests in this regard. Both the American company "Federal Express" and the Ministry of National Defense in Bucharest requested a modified version of the plane, which involved lengthening it by two meters and building a cargo model. In the end, even M.Ap.N. said they did not need this type of aircraft.

However, the negotiations were continued by General Mihai Pacepa, Constantin Stanciu and Vasile Pungan, in the unfavorable conditions mentioned, in which an important role was played by the West German citizen of Romanian origin Rolf Spitra, businessman and, apparently, agent of influence of the Romanian espionage, in the German space¹.

In May 1978, with the direct approval of Mihai Pacepa, a delegation of five specialists from VFW Fokker, which included Rolf Spitra, visited all the objectives of the Romanian aeronautical industry to "convince" of the technical potential of the Romanian parties takeover of VFW 614 aircraft.

Later, in the autumn of 1978, based on the instructions of Nicolae Ceaușescu, a delegation consisting of representatives of MCECEI and the Bucharest Aeronautical Group (GAB) left for the Federal Republic of Germany, in Bremen, to continue discussions with VFW Fokker.

¹ IM Pacepa presented to the dignitaries from Bucharest Rolf Spitra as the most influential person through whom the Romanian state could obtain the project and the manufacturing technology of the "VFW 614" plane. Subsequently, the DGIE established that he was a former West German intelligence and counterintelligence agent, the owner of a small construction company and a real estate agency in FRG, and in the "Fokker" transaction IM Pacepa was the one who introduced him, with all the opposition of the representatives of VFW "Fokker". The friendship between the two became famous after 1974, with Rolf Spitra waiting for IM Pacepa at the airport when he arrived in Germany, providing him with "Fokker" planes or procuring various valuable goods. Instead, when Rolf Spitra came to Romania, he was taken to various foreign trade companies or his expenses for spending holidays on the Romanian coast were borne. Significantly, after the failure of IM Pacepa, Rolf Spitra was banned by the German state from traveling to Romania.

According to the mandate, the Romanian delegation had to obtain the purchase of the goods and documentation necessary for the construction of the VFW 614 aircraft in Romania and at half the price established in the documents for the establishment of joint ventures. Payment was to be made only after inventory and receipt of the goods. The planes that were to be bought by TAROM had to be certified and good, and the payment of the last installments of the contract of DM 500,000 had to be made only after the inventory of the goods and documentation.

However, the management of VFW Fokker refused, invoking the agreed contractual conditions, to grant any guarantee to the assets transferred to the Romanian party, not being responsible for their quality either. Also, the company did not guarantee that all the documentation and components included in the lists drawn up at the end of the 614 Program were still in its custody of 500 thousand DM. The termination of the contract must take place by the end of October 1978. In order to postpone or avoid the payment of the third installment, the Romanian side requested the management of VFW Fokker to re-discuss some articles of the contract negotiated at the end of August 1978 and on to which the West German representatives returned when, in October 9-17, the same year, a Romanian delegation participated in negotiations in the FRG. This created irritation at the level of the management of VFW Fokker, whose director Schäffler sent a telex to General V. Bucur, the Romanian head of the aviation industry appointed to the negotiations, in which in addition to the "astonishment" of the West German side the principles presented by the German company were never accepted, it was announced that from its point of view the negotiations could be considered as failed [3].

On the same day, October 26, 1978, the management of Rolls-Royce, the manufacturer of the engine for the plane wanted by the Romanians, announced in a letter to the Bucharest authorities that it would "not resume production of the engine for VFW 614 at Rolls-Royce of the documentation, SDVs, equipment and know-how to allow the takeover of the engine manufacturing [...] the difficulties would be difficult to overcome" due to the improper conditions in the Romanian industry. As for the consultancy in the construction of the engine, the British company did not have the possibility to provide it, VFW 614 being an out-of-production model.

4. THE PROJECT OUTCOME & CONCLUSIONS

Finally, a direct response was given to the Bucharest leadership's attempt to procure state-of-the-art technology in the field of aviation. It could be deciphered during the negotiations carried out by the Romanian representatives in the FRG, when the representatives of the German company declared that their interest is only to sell and not to help the Romanian side in continuing the manufacture of this aircraft. During the talks, the West German representatives showed their lack of interest in selling the program to the Romanian side, referring to the "capitalization of the program in another way" and the fact that all their expenses for this program were taken over by the FRG government. One of the principles put forward by the German side was that everything should be sold: the materials and equipment needed for the construction were to be delivered as they were then, whether or not they were under warranty or defective. No engine was delivered (hence the suspicion that the German side was afraid of a technology theft), and VFW was obliged to return any engine produced to Rolls-Royce. The means of production were retained by the German company for its own needs, and the primary components and parts were delivered selectively. In terms of documentation, the German company undertook to deliver only one copy, not agreeing with the delivery of the originals or microfilms.

Even existing aircraft in various stages of assembly could not be delivered for various reasons, only new completed aircraft. The planes, from the moment they were on the Romanian territory, lost their LBA airworthiness certificate (which restricted their right to fly).

In addition, the exclusive right to manufacture the plane by the Romanian side was for only 3 years (the Romanian representatives had asked for at least 10 years). All this showed, if necessary, that VFW Fokker, and thus the West German state, did not want to sell the 614 Program to a socialist country, but that, for political reasons related to the Bucharest regime, it was delayed a negative response in this regard.

In addition, in September 1978, the government in Bucharest managed to conclude a contract with the English company BAC for the construction of an aircraft similar to the one requested by the West German party. As a result, both parties became disinterested in the VFW Fokker project.

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