

Europe to Open Its Skies to Drones

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Europe to open skies to drones by 2016 says Commission document



In an obscure working document, the European Commission has announced it is working on plans to open European civil airspace to unmanned drones by 2016. This follows the signing by President Obama earlier this year of the FAA Appropriations bill which mandated that US airspace must be opened to drones by 2015.

The European Commission (EC) plan was revealed in a Staff Working Paper published on September 4th 2012 entitled [“Towards a European strategy for the development of civil applications of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems”](#).

The document summarizes the conclusions of the year-long European [Unmanned Air Systems Panel which began meeting in July 2011](#) and recommends setting up a European RPAS [Remotely Piloted Air Systems] Steering Group (ERSG). The aim of the ERSG, writes Peter van Blyenburgh, President of [UVS International](#), (the main European drone lobby group) on the [UAVS Vision website](#) is to “foster the development of civil RPAS by planning and coordinating all the activities necessary to achieve the safe and incremental integration of RPAS into European air traffic by 2016”.

Surprisingly - or not depending on your view of the inner workings of the EC - membership of the ERSG has already been decided and it has already met to begin its work before its existence was announced. The group is co-chaired by the EC’s Directorate-General Enterprise & Industry and Directorate-General Mobility & Transport. Other members include representatives of other EC directorates plus what it calls a whole range of “stakeholders”. These include industry bodies including UVS International, the main drone lobby group.

The ERSG has established three working groups and is planning to publish by December 2012 a “comprehensive roadmap” towards the integration of civil drones into European airspace by 2016.

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