

Military “Drone Club”: Europe to Boost its Defence Potential

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Global Research, December 01, 2013

[Strategic Culture Foundation](#) 30 November
2013

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

Photo: dw.de

On November 20 Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yuri Borisov said that Russian government's spending for procurement of military equipment will increase by 25 percent next year. The expenditure is to reach 1.7 trillion rubles (\$52 billion) in 2014, up from the 1.35 trillion rubles allocated for state defense contracts this year. The decision reflects the trend of increased defense spending. Russia is currently implementing an ambitious 20 trillion ruble (\$640 billion) rearmament program planned to run up until 2020. The program will see the share of modern weaponry in Russia's armed forces reach 30 percent by 2015 and 70 percent by 2020. According to Borisov, a state arms procurement program for the decade up to 2025 is in works giving priority to qualitative edge, standardization and unification of weapons systems. Some say the effort is in contrast with the sequester in the USA and economic woes faced by NATO and EU members. The reality is that economic difficulties aside, the military capabilities are still very much at the top of US and European allies' priority lists. The US programs have been described previously in the Strategic Culture Foundation publications [\(1\)](#) and [\(2\)](#). It is expedient to have at least a cursory look at the trends in Europe, especially before the EU December summit expected to address the security issues.

The European Union 28 heads of state and governments come together in December for the Brussels summit to discuss security and defence matters at the highest level for the first time in five years. At present the organization is involved in 15 peacekeeping and conflict resolution operations around the world. European leaders agreed plans for greater defence co-operation at the December 2012 summit in Brussels with defence chiefs having to coordinate capabilities and procurement. The final communique calls for «*a more systematic and longer term European defence co-operation*». The activities are closely coordinated with NATO plans. The November 19 defence ministers' meeting in Brussels is the last cornerstone in months of preparatory work that have been going on at many levels. The agenda is clearly defined as: «*increasing the effectiveness, visibility and impact of the CSDP (Common Security and Diplomatic Policy); enhancing the development of defence capabilities; and strengthening Europe's defence industry*». The issues prevailing the discussions will be air-to-air refueling, remotely piloted aircraft systems and cyber defense. The process is gaining momentum proving the defense issues are still very much on the table in Europe no matter it faces economic woes.

European military programs

Seven EU countries have formed what France calls a «club» to produce military drones from 2020 onward. The accord was reached in Brussels on November 19 at a meeting of the European Defence Agency (EDA), the EU's defence think tank, by France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain. The defence ministers signed a «letter of intent» to task the Agency to draw up a study on joint production of Medium Altitude Long Endurance (Male) craft used to strike military targets or for surveillance of migrant boats in the Mediterranean Sea. Peter Round, told media: «*This is the starting pistol for us to be able to start work on a European Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems*». French defence minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian [called](#) the group of seven a «*club of drone-using countries*».

Three European arms firms - France's Dassault, Franco-German firm Eads and Italy's Finmeccanica - agreed in June to launch their own European drone program. France, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland are working on what they call a «euro-Ucav,» or unmanned combat air vehicle, the Neuron, which made a test flight in December 2012. France and the UK are working on a «stealth» drone called Telemos to fly in 2018. The EDA meeting also called for «increased co-operation» by EU states on air-to-air refueling, satellite communications and cyber defence.

Speaking on November 4 to Greek daily Naftemporiki on the US snooping scandal, she said EU justice Commissioner Viviane Reding has said the Union should create its own intelligence service by 2020: «*What we need is to strengthen Europe in this field, so we can level the playing field with our US partners*». EU countries' intelligence agencies already cooperate to some extent. They share classified information on conflicts and terrorist threats in IntCen, a branch of the EU Foreign Service. Counter-terrorism specialists also meet in the so-called CP931 working group in the EU Council. Outside EU structures, member states' intelligence chiefs occasionally meet in what they call the Club de Berne and in a Club de Berne offshoot, the Counter Terrorism Group. The EU Foreign Service gets updates from its 13 civilian and military crisis missions, such as the Eulex police force in Kosovo or its border mission in Georgia. It also has 40-or-so Regional Security Officers, who file reports from EU embassies in risky places, such as Lebanon or Libya, and it is test-running a scheme to hire EU countries' security experts as military attaches in a handful of delegations. The official noted that creating a European Intelligence Service would require an EU treaty change and that Reding's notion, if it is taken up, would have to be dealt with after the EU elections in 2014.

France has taken a leading role in Europe since the election of Nicolas Sarkozy as president in May, 2007. By 2009 France had rejoined NATO's military command, after a 40-year absence, and was soon led the NATO attack against Libya. Mr. Hollande continues the policy. Last May the French government released a sweeping review of its defence strategy. No great cuts on defense in the times of economic troubles, the «white paper» outlined a new emphasis in France's foreign-policy interests. The paper observed that the U.S. is switching its attention toward Asia and retrenching from North Africa and the Middle East, opening up an opportunity for France to take a leadership role in this area. France has always had a keen interest in the region. It was French and British diplomats who carved up the Middle East into spheres of influence in 1916. Some question Mr. Hollande's new aggressive stand on Syria and his attempts to push France into a more active position in Europe.

Franco-British defence cooperation is growing stronger. The two are the EU's leading military powers spending together €92 billion on defence last year (more than Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain put together), according to Stockholm International

Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). In line with the 2010 Lancaster House Treaties, the UK and French military force regularly conduct joint exercises. The forces of the both countries have been deployed together in large-scale exercises. The plans include the establishment of a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) by 2016. The CJEF's air component has already gone through tests at exercises.

There are joint equipment projects implemented, including nuclear missile testing. The countries plan to join efforts in developing a sea-launched missile and have joint projects to secure nuclear warhead stockpiles (in Valduc in France and Aldermaston in the UK). British defence contractor BAE Systems and France's Dassault Aviation were last year awarded a contract to develop next-generation unmanned drone aircraft. They are already building a «Future Combat Air System», due in 2030, with manufacturers to send in proposals this month. Shrinking budgets have bolstered the two countries' determination to work together. For the first time France has invited Britain's ambassador (along with a German diplomat) to help draft France's next long-term military plan, [the Livre Blanc](#). «As shown from our joint operations in Libya and Mali, the UK and France are natural partners and have a key role to play in leading and shaping the defence and security of Europe», a British defence ministry spokesman told EUobserver on [September 17](#).

No matter Europe faces tough economic times, military issues are very much on the agenda with plans to upkeep a potential going far beyond purely defensive requirements...

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