EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

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European Commission calls for tough standards to regulate civil drones

The European Commission has today proposed to set tough new standards to regulate the operations of civil drones (or "remotely piloted aircraft sytems" – RPAS). The new standards will cover safety, security, privacy, data protection, insurance and liability. The aim is to allow European industry to become a global leader in the market for this emerging technology, while at the same time ensuring that all the necessary safeguards are in place.

Civil drones are increasingly being used in Europe, in countries such as Sweden, France and the UK, in different sectors, but under a fragmented regulatory framework. Basic national safety rules apply, but the rules differ across the EU and a number of key safeguards are not addressed in a coherent way.

Vice-President Siim Kallas, Commissioner for mobility and transport, said: "Civil drones can check for damage on road and rail bridges, monitor natural disasters such as flooding and spray crops with pinpoint accuracy. They come in all shapes and sizes. In the future they may even deliver books from your favourite online retailer. But many people, including myself, have concerns about the safety, security and privacy issues relating to these devices."

The technology for civil drones is maturing and there is potential for significant growth and job creation. On some estimates in the next 10 years it could be worth 10% of the aviation market — that's €15 billion per year. The Vice-President added, "If ever there was a right time to do this, and to do this at a European level, it is now. Because remotely piloted aircraft, almost by definition, are going to cross borders and the industry is still in its infancy. We have an opportunity now to make a single set of rules that everyone can work with, just like we do for larger aircraft."

The new standards will cover the following areas

Strict EU wide rules on safety authorisations. Safety is the first priority for EU aviation policy. EU standards will be based on the principle that civil drones (remotely piloted aircraft) must provide an equivalent level of safety to 'manned' aviation operations. EASA, the European Aviation Safety Agency, will start developing specific EU-wide standards for remotely piloted aircraft.

Tough controls on privacy and data protection. Data collected by remotely piloted aircraft, must comply with the applicable data protection rules and data protection authorities must monitor the subsequent collection and processing of personal data. The Commission will assess how to ensure data protection rules apply fully to remotely piloted aircraft and propose changes or specific guidance where it is needed.

Controls to ensure security. Civil drones can be subject to potential unlawful actions and security threats, like other aircraft. EASA will start work to develop the necessary security requirements, particularly to protect information streams, and then propose specific legal obligations for all players concerned (e.g. air traffic management, the operator, the telecom service providers), to be enforced by national authorities.

A clear framework for liability and insurance. The current third-party insurance regime has been established mostly in terms of manned aircraft, where mass (starting from 500kg) determines the minimum amount of insurance. The Commission will assess the need to amend the current rules to take into account the specificities of remotely piloted aircraft.

Streamlining R&D and supporting new industry. The Commission will streamline R&D work, in particular the EU R&D funds managed by the SESAR Joint Undertaking to keep lead times for promising technologies for the insertion of RPAS into the European airspace as short as possible. SMEs and start-ups in the sector will get industrial support to develop appropriate technologies (under Horizon 2020 and COSME programmes).

What happens next?

The Commission will carry out in 2014 an in-depth impact assessment to examine the issues and define the best options to address them. This may be followed by a legislative proposal, to be approved by Member States and the European Parliament. In addition, EASA can immediately start to develop the necessary safety standards. Other measures may include support actions under existing EU programmes such as SESAR, Horizon 2020 or COSME. All this work aims to meet the stated objective of the European Council of December 2013 to ensure the progressive integration of RPAS into airspace as from 2016.

More information:

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