



Media advisory

Embargoed until 23:59, Tuesday 11 February 2014

European taxpayers are spending millions supporting unaccountable drones industry, report reveals

A new report *Eurodrones Inc.* exposes the substantial political and economic support given to the drone industry by European citizens without their knowledge and with little public scrutiny or consultation.

It traces how hundreds of millions of euros of taxpayers money has been granted in R&D subsidies and how drone policy is being driven almost entirely by the defence and security industry who seek to profit from it. Public and private interests have become so tightly intermingled that lobbyists have awarded prizes to numerous EU officials for their commitment to unmanned aircraft and the insertion of drones into civil airspace.

The 40,000 word report examines how:

- The EU's drone policy has evolved into a coherent action plan to remove the regulatory and technical barriers that currently limit the flight of drones in civilian airspace;
- A €70 million budget line aimed at ensuring widespread civilian drone flight was inserted into new EU legislation as “a politically driven priority” despite the fact that there has been no democratic debate on the issue;
- At least €315 million of EU research funding has been awarded to drone-based projects, many of which are subsidising Europe's largest defence and security companies and are geared towards the development and enhancement of tools for border surveillance and law enforcement;
- At least a dozen public officials have received awards for their personal commitment to the integration of drones into civil airspace from industry lobby group *UVS International*;
- MEP Vittorio Prodi has told meetings organised by the European Commission about “the support of the European Parliament to the development of UAS [Unmanned Aerial Systems] for civil use”, even though the European Parliament has adopted no formal position on UAS;
- The EU's own plans mirror a wider global aerospace 'roadmap' drawn up in an entirely technocratic manner by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and which aims to ensure regular civilian drone flight by 2028, globally; and
- The EU and US have signed a formal agreement that commits them to cooperating on the integration of drones into civil airspace and the harmonisation of air traffic management systems.

The report also looks at the ways in which:

- The European Defence Agency has put significant research funding into drone technology and is encouraging the development of military drones, in particular through a new European Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) drone project run by seven EU member states;
- Drones are seen as beneficial to Europe's plans for immigration control and may become a key tool of both Frontex, the EU's border agency (which has paid for demonstrations of Israeli drones described as the "ultimate solution for Over The Hill reconnaissance missions, Low Intensity Conflicts and Urban warfare operations") and a key component of EUROSUR, the European Border Surveillance System, which seeks to utilise drones along with other sensors, radars, and satellite imagery for the control of Europe's borders
- The EU is deepening its relationship with the European Space Agency, which is pivotal to the development of the satellite and telecommunications infrastructure needed to fly drones beyond the 'line-of-sight'

The report finds that although drones may bring a variety of innovations and benefits across different sectors and markets, the EU's support appears largely designed to benefit a defence industry desperate to compete in the growing global market for military drones and diversify into civilian markets. Because the EU – with the exception of the still fledgling European Defence Agency – has been prohibited from funding military R&D, the European Commission has effectively been subsidising the defence sector to develop drones for 'homeland security' purposes. The report warns that this is tacitly encouraging the further militarisation of the EU and the continued drive toward automation in warfare.

The report also calls for proper democratic control and public debate about the trajectory of both drone policy and technology. The European Commission stated in a September 2012 working paper that the "process supporting the development of civil Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems applications needs to be transparent and involve the consultation of stakeholders, for example bodies like the European Group on Ethics, the LIBE Committee of the European Parliament or the European Agency for Fundamental Rights and Data Protection Supervisor". Yet none of these bodies have been involved in the lengthy process leading up to the current 'roadmap' or formally consulted since. Their absence from policy debates means that many of the conversations the EU should be having about drones – such as what they should and should not be used for, and how to prevent further militarisation and the deployment of fully autonomous weaponised drones – have been all but ignored.

Co-author Ben Hayes comments:

It's easy to see why people are so excited about drones: there are many positive things they could be used for. But there's also a clear direction of travel in terms of developing drones for high-tech warfare and mass population surveillance. The EU has a moral and legal obligation to support responsible innovation and ensure that fundamental rights and the rule of law guide all of its policies.

Co-author Chris Jones comments:

The EU's emerging drone policy has come about following years of successful lobbying by defence and security companies and their associates and policy has been largely driven by those same defence and security contractors that have the most to gain. Despite the clear implications for civil liberties of civilian drone use there has so far been no meaningful consultation with the public, civil society, or democratic institutions. A proper debate and discussion and an immediate shift towards transparent, open and accountable decision-making is vital.