Drones and new systems of warfare – the EU‘s need to adapt to be fit for today‘s security challenges

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The European Parliament adopted by 483 votes to 68, with 76 abstentions, a resolution on drones and new systems of warfare – the EU’s need to adapt to be fit for today’s security challenges.

Drone warfare

Drones have become a **defining feature of modern warfare**, exemplified in Ukraine and in multiple conflicts worldwide, including those in Gaza, Israel, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Sudan, Myanmar, and Azerbaijan’s war against Armenia, as well as in attacks on international vessels in the Red Sea.

Parliament stated that the mass proliferation of precision-strike capability has permanently changed the modern battlefield, EU defence needs and resilience requirements for the Member States. Recent hostile drone incidents and incursions targeting EU Member States, notably on the Union’s Eastern flank, have demonstrated the urgent need to field multilayered defences to protect critical infrastructure and enhance resilience.

Drones have become a defining feature of modern warfare and hybrid conflicts, accelerating decision-making. Furthermore, related unmanned domains (surface robots and underwater drones) are expanding and must be reflected in future defence planning.

Furthermore, adversaries’ rapid development of drone manufacturing capacity, supported by external partners, together with the dominance of certain third-country suppliers of key components such as sensors, batteries, semiconductors and rare-earth materials, heightens strategic dependencies and underlines the **urgency of strengthening Europe’s dual-use innovation base and secure supply chains**.

Supply chain vulnerabilities

Faced with supply chain vulnerabilities (60 % of the components of drones originate in the United States and China), Members consider that strategic cooperation should also **address emerging technological competition** from Russia and China and safeguard European access to innovation and materials required for sustainable drone and counter-drone capabilities.

China has begun restricting exports of drone components and materials to Ukraine and Western buyers and has introduced sweeping export controls on rare-earth elements and related processing technologies, citing national security concerns.

Consequently, Members believe the EU urgently needs **to develop alternative sources**, recycling capacity, and sovereign extraction of critical raw materials to reduce the vulnerabilities created by Chinese export restrictions and global supply-chain concentration.

Parliament stressed that **strategic partnerships** are essential to achieving the mass and qualitative edge required to reach operational thresholds and access to expertise and raw materials.

Adapting combat doctrine to drones

Parliament encouraged armed forces to integrate and align drones in all combat doctrines as a layer in operational planning with a focus on hybrid warfare scenarios, ensuring interoperability with NATO C2 systems, civil air traffic management systems, and the EU's U-Space framework for drone integration.

Deterrent and defensive posture

Parliament called on frontline Member States to adopt **strategic development plans and investment frameworks**, and to develop strategic programmes and projects aimed at developing and securing comprehensive drone and counter-drone capabilities within their territory, covering the entire capability cycle from research and development to deployment, including testing, certification, production, and training. Member States are urged to be prepared to **activate Article 42(7) of the EU Treaty** when aggressive actions amount to an armed attack or contribute to the preparation of an imminent attack.

Access of SMEs to funding and public procurement

Parliament recognised that 80% of the European industry involved in the development, manufacture and operation of light drones consists of SMEs. It therefore recommended the creation of specific mechanisms to support SME onboarding by **reducing administrative burdens**, introducing direct-funding instruments with tolerance for failure, and providing opportunities for mini-grants and rapid-funding tools essential for SMEs. Simplify procedures and support measures for SMEs is essential. The EDF programmes should allow more rapid scaling of SMEs via a series of funding rounds that support early growth and access to capital.

Strategic funding and EU financial envelopes

The resolution emphasised the need to ensure, through current instruments and the next multiannual financial framework, the continued development of drone-related defence innovation, skills, certification standards, testing and training infrastructure in the field of defence by means of drones throughout the EU.

Member States must leverage various new EU defence spending instruments and initiatives to **develop cost-effective solutions to counter drone warfare**. These solutions should prioritise industrial resilience in Europe, reduce our dependence on third countries, support defence SMEs, and ensure that investments result in the development of concrete, rapidly deployable capabilities to support Ukraine and bolster the EU's defence.

Dual use for resilience

Many critical drone technologies for defence originate in the civilian domain and use critical components of a dual-use nature. Members consider that the development of drones and counter-drone systems should be accompanied by **robust safeguards for civilian protection**, social resilience, and the responsible dual-use of technology, ensuring that investments in defence also strengthen health, humanitarian logistics and civil protection capacities.