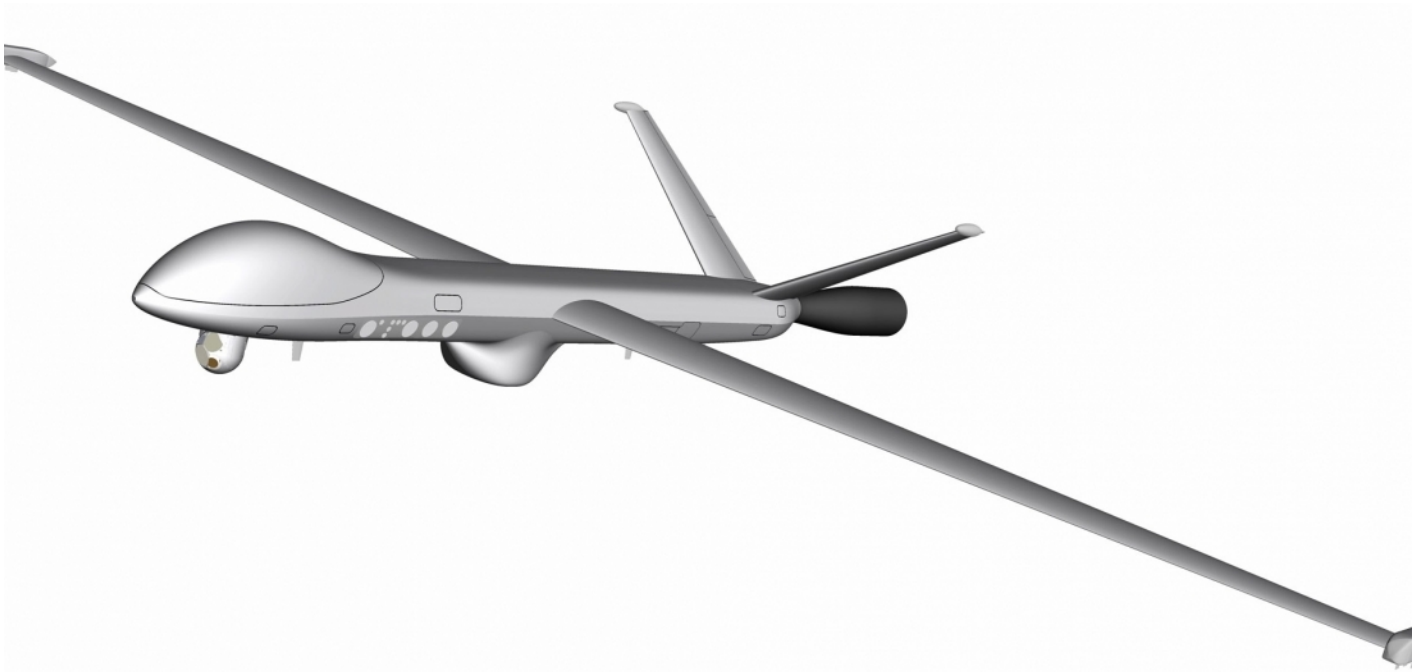




EURO-MALE UAS PROJECT STILL AWAITING ACTION

News / Airlines



Progress toward an **all-European medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) UAS** remains very slow, despite last week's announcement that **Germany** would take the lead in the unmanned aircraft program and that Spain had joined. France and Italy are the other two nations that have agreed to fund a project definition (PD) study by an industrial partnership among Airbus Defence and Space; Dassault Aviation; and Finmeccanica. But it is now 19 months since the partners submitted their outline PD proposal; seven months since the nations agreed to go ahead; the contract might not be signed for another six months; and the UAS may not be ready for service until 2025.

The German ministry of defense said that the study would cost €60 million (\$66 million) with the costs distributed as follows: 31 percent to Germany and 23 percent each to France, Italy and Spain. The contract would be administered by the pan-European defense procurement agency OCCAR, and the European Defence Agency (EDA) would make inputs to the project on airspace integration and other regulatory issues. Airbus D&S told AIN that the final cost of the study has yet to be negotiated, and that the nations would have to add their own management costs, including those of OCCAR.

One key agreed characteristic of any Euro-MALE would be its ability to operate in non-segregated airspace, performing parapublic missions such as border surveillance and internal security surveillance. But it still seems that little else has yet been agreed between the nations and industry about the UAV's characteristics. An Airbus spokesman told AIN that the industrial partners are trying to help the nations decide such questions as maximum speed and mission profiles, in

advance of PD contract signature. At a meeting with journalists in October, new Airbus D&S head of military aircraft Fernando Alonso said there had been little progress in defining the Euro-MALE. His sales chief Antonio Barberan said the project is “absolutely key” to the company’s future.

The German government said that other European nations could join the project. But the UK, which is the key stand-out, seems determined to buy the certifiable version of the GA-ASI Predator B as a follow-on to its existing fleet of similar but uncertifiable MQ-9 Reapers. And because the Euro-MALE project is proving so slow to take off, various European countries are opting for so-called “interim” solutions. Spain recently decided to accept a U.S. FMS offer for four MQ-9 Block 5 Reapers and two mobile ground control stations (GCS) valued at \$176 million, and France last week ordered a third Reaper system comprising three Block 5 UAVs plus two GCS, for delivery in 2019. Germany is considering another extension to the contract held by Airbus D&S that provides and operates IAI Heron 1 UAVs. If agreed, the company would provide larger Heron TPs.

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