Air Europe Naval

ECA Group to Deploy its Unmanned Naval Systems for OCEAN2020 Demonstration

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French company, ECA Group has announced that it will be deploying its Inspector MK2 unmanned surface vehicle (USV) and A-serie autonomous underwater vehicles (AUV) for the OCEAN2020 demonstration.

The unmanned systems will be used to conduct maritime interdiction operations against suspicious vessels involved in illegal weapons trafficking and smuggling activities.

ECA Group is one of the participants in the OCEAN2020 consortium, which won a major project contract as part of the European Commission's 2017 Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR) initiative. The competitive selection was conducted by the European Defence Agency (EDA).

This project, with 35 million euros in funding, aims to develop a technology demonstrator that will validate the concept of deploying a complete array of drone systems (air, surface and submarine) for surveillance in a maritime environment.

OCEAN2020 Project

The OCEAN2020 project related to the first European Defence Fund's initiative to boost Europe's defence capabilities, issued by the European Union under the PADR programme.

OCEAN2020 is the first example of a cross-European military research programme to-date. The bid required a thorough analysis of operational requirements and a technologically-innovative yet operationally-realistic proposal. The research project also will see the integration of unmanned platforms in surveillance and interdiction missions.

The OCEAN2020 team, which will be led by Leonardo, comprises 42 partners from 15 European countries. These include the Ministries of Defence of Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Lithuania, with additional support from the Ministries of Defence of Sweden, France, the United Kingdom and Estonia and the Netherlands.

European industrial partners include Indra, Safran, Saab, MBDA, PGZ/CTM, Hensoldt, Intracom-IDE, Fincantieri and QinetiQ. A number of research centres are also participating in the project including Fraunhofer, TNO, CMRE (NATO) and IAI.

OCEAN2020 will see unmanned platforms of different type (UAVs with fixed wings or rotary wings, surface – UAVs and underwater-UUVs robotics) integrated within naval units' command and control centres, allowing for data exchange via satellite, with command and control centres on land. The joint and cooperative use of both manned and unmanned vehicles will also be demonstrated as part of the project.

In addition to complex simulation work, OCEAN2020 project will involve two live demonstrations (in the Mediterranean and Baltic Seas) of maritime surveillance and interdiction operations, conducted by European fleets using unmanned aircraft, surface vessels and underwater systems. The data collected by various systems during these two demos will be processed and sent to a prototype European command and control centre in Brussels.

ECA Group's Role in OCEAN2020 Project

ECA Group will be a prominent actor during the first demo, coordinated by the Italian Navy, scheduled to take place in the Mediterranean Sea in 2019. With the planned support of the French Navy, along with unmanned platforms from partners SAFRAN (France), IDE (Greece), and CMRE (NATO), ECA Group will deploy its Inspector MKII USV and one of its A-serie AUVs (A9, A18, A27) to conduct maritime interdiction operations against suspicious vessels involved in illegal weapons trafficking and smuggling activities.

Part of the missions deals with the localisation and the identification of sunken illegal goods/weapons on the seabed. This is achieved efficiently through the collaborative teamwork of the USVs/AUVs whose mission can be configured, planned for, executed and supervised using ECA Group Mission Management Platform UMIS. Recovery of the sunken,

localised/identified, crates could then be performed, whenever decided, by a remotely operated ROV (ECA Group range of ROVs).