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Drones: Commission adopts new rules and conditions for safe, secure and green drone operations – Questions and Answers

What is the U-space?

'U-space' is the European term used for Unmanned Traffic Management (UTM), a set of new services relying on a high level of digitalisation and automation of functions, and specific procedures designed to support safe, efficient and secure access to airspace for large numbers of drones.

What does 'U' stand for in U-space?

'U' could stand for 'unmanned' or 'urban', as this is the first environment in which we see a demand for routine commercial drone operations. U-space is also a laboratory for innovative technologies and services that could contribute to the modernisation of aviation. In that context, 'U' could also be seen as standing for 'universal'.

What is the objective of the U-space?

The current EU aviation regulatory framework already allows all kinds of drone operations. But these operations could be subject to strict approval processes and operational restrictions. The objective of the U-space is to improve overall situational awareness for drone operations, as well as to streamline and automate the flight authorisation process, to lift as many restrictions as safely possible, and to support the development of a competitive EU drone services market.

Where will the U-space be implemented?

The U-space will be first implemented in urban and sub-urban environments, around logistic hubs and around airports, where the complexity of traffic patterns and the demand for value-added drone services dictate the need for specific traffic management solutions.

When will the U-space be implemented?

This initial, harmonised U-space framework will become applicable in January 2023. Member States may still embark on pioneering implementations before this date, and are not obliged to deploy a U-space everywhere in their airspace by the same date.

Before implementing the U-space, Member States will need to prepare to implement a number of requirements, such as those for the certification of U-space service providers, and when necessary for the Single Common Information Service, in line with the U-space Regulation.

Does the U-space support the full integration of drones and traditional aviation?

The approach to drone integration is that of a gradual progression. This initial U-space framework keeps drone and traditional air traffic separate, for technical, legal and operational reasons. But it already streamlines the drone flight approval process and improves overall situational awareness, bringing tangible benefits to all stakeholders.

Later, as technology progresses, the framework will evolve, and different types of traffic will be able to intermix more closely.

The long-term vision remains that of full integration of all types of traffic in the same airspace, with common rules and fully automated and digital traffic management solutions.

Does the U-space support security and address the threat of non-cooperative drones?

The U-space will improve overall situational awareness, sharing the position and identity of cooperative drones with relevant authorities. This will be a significant asset in identifying compliant drone operators compared to non-compliant ones.