

Dear Minister Schnieder

Dear Mayor Dr. Keller

Dear Florian Guillermet

Dear Michael

Dear Jan-Christoph

Dear Wolfram

Dear Representatives of the media

Ladies and gentlemen!

Today's event marks much more than „just“ the beginning of Europe's leading trade show for autonomy and robotics, as well as the most important European conference for commercial unmanned aviation.

So let me start with a number: 100,000.

100,000 commercially operated drones in the air over Europe every day. At least. And not in some distant future. But within 5 years. This is not wishful thinking to bolster the UAS industry and our members. It is a necessity to make Europe independent and resilient

And it is not a utopia. It is a well-founded assessment – based on technological maturity, economic demand, and current observations.

Protecting critical infrastructure. Medical supply flights. Inspections of wind farms, rail tracks, utility networks. Precision agriculture. Disaster response. Autonomous police drones. Transport logistics. These applications exist. They are technically feasible. Many of them are already a reality today.

And yet – to be honest – we are still operating well below what would be possible. And what would be necessary to keep pace with other regions of the world, where,

although neither technologically nor regulatorily ahead of us in Europe, the willingness – and one might say the courage to implement – is greater.

Let's understand this moment for what it is. A significant push for the unmanned future.

Today certainly marks a milestone for our industry. But milestones are not goals – they are waypoints. And I would like to talk with you today and in the coming three days about where this path leads, what is holding us back, and what we must do together to make Europe what it can be: a driving force for the development of the global UAS industry, a pace-setter for safe, sovereign, and scalable unmanned aviation.

The question is not: Is the goal of 100,000 commercially operated drones realistic?
The question is: What is actually holding us back?

The answer is fundamentally simple yet quite complex. Essentially, we need to tackle four challenges and jointly correct a crucial misconception.

First: Regulation

Europe has set global standards with the U-Space framework and the EASA regulations. We can be proud of that. However, pride must not lead to complacency and, in turn, stagnation. Today, we are experiencing that well-intentioned and theoretically feasible regulations become bottlenecks in practice. Not because safety is misunderstood, but because standard processes are not treated as standardized. We need speed where risks are clearly defined and manageable. We need proportionality. And we need regulatory courage. For example, to make BVLOS operations the norm rather than the exception. Or to operate drones for commercial purposes within controlled airspace. The approval process for our live demos alone has made it very clear where we urgently need to make improvements!

Second: Acceptance

Drones remain a source of mistrust in parts of society. This cannot be solved with marketing campaigns but only with what commercial aviation has built over decades: reliable processes, clear responsibilities, a transparent just culture, and a safety record that speaks for itself. Trust is the result of practical implementation – not of communication about what is theoretically possible. However, this requires political leadership. Because demanding proven operational safety without enabling operations asks for the impossible.

Third: Mass production and scaling

A market does not emerge from prototypes or model airplanes. A market is created through network effects, economic and operational reliability. With predictable costs and robust supply chains. Without industrial production, without standardized platforms, and without professional maintenance and spare parts logistics, UAS operations remain too costly, fragile, and ultimately unprofitable. If Europe truly wants to be independent of other regions of the world and, furthermore, become the driving force in global development in uncrewed aviation, we must collectively improve. I emphasize collectively. Because this is a task that we, as Europeans, must tackle together.

And now we come to the mentioned misconception.

Fourth: Drones are aircraft

While they typically operate in lower airspace, they are nonetheless part of the entire air traffic system. This means: airworthiness, operational procedures, maintenance, qualified staff, air traffic management – none of this is optional. This is the DNA of a system that can scale. Those who ignore this logic will fail – technically, economically, or regulatorily. Probably in all three aspects.

The good news: We know the model. Commercial aviation has demonstrated it. Certifying platforms, integrating applications, and thinking about safety and scaling

together – that is the way forward. We need a clear European regulatory framework that allows for scalable operations. The guiding principle must be: as few restrictions as necessary – as much safety as possible. If a drone is demonstrably safe, it should fundamentally be allowed to fly everywhere, not just in some areas. For this, we need to place the necessary trust in unmanned systems.

We need complete air situation awareness in the lower airspace.

Everyone who flies legally must be visible - And those who are not visible must be made visible - In the interest of all! ADS-L for all participants of the lower airspace, eConspicuity as the standard, a fully digitized, transparent, and interoperable airspace where all aircraft – manned and unmanned – can technically detect each other and autonomously avoid potential conflicts. This strengthens safety, acceptance, and ultimately the operational capability of authorities.

However, it is also true that illegally operated drones and the threats to critical infrastructure are a reality that we must confront decisively. Identification, detection, and effective countermeasures require coordinated standards, legally reliable procedures, and interoperable systems. A secure ecosystem is not just a protective shield – it is the prerequisite for growth in the legal commercial UAS market. All of this makes it easier to enable BVLOS missions in multi-drone operations. Only when the mandatory 1:1 principle between the operator and the UAV is finally a thing of the past can the economic and social benefits of modern drone technology be fully utilized. Those monitoring infrastructure or operating logistics networks need economies of scale.

For this, we need the courage for platform logic. We must understand drones for what they are: a tool in the sky. An instrument to fulfill a specific task. To achieve this, certain standards will be developed, and not every conceivable application needs a separate tool. For Europe, it will be crucial that suitable platforms are available in sufficient numbers and at competitive prices to create ecosystems around them – for civil and military use cases!

Europe's resilience is not a nice-to-have. It is a matter of survival. Today, we can see thousands of drones from China in use within the police, public authorities, border control, and firefighting services. This is economically understandable. But from the perspective of Europe's technological independence, it is strategically unacceptable.

Europe needs its own industrial capabilities – fully automated production lines with predictable procurement paths, clear requirements, and long-term purchasing programs – driven by both: public and defense sector!

And yes – I am optimistic. Not in spite of these challenges. But because I know that the conditions are right. Because I know what Europe already has. We have excellent research and science. We have innovative start-ups with founders who really want to make a difference. We have political stability, legal certainty, and one of the world's largest markets. We have an industry that is ready. And we have – as today's event shows – a growing community.

If we pool these strengths: with a clear regulatory vision, an industry-capable scaling strategy, and a safety understanding - following the proven examples of classic aviation - then Europe will not only be a user of this technology. Europe will be its designer.

Talking about collaboration and pooling strengths. Please allow me, at this point, also on behalf of my colleagues, to make a personal remark. I want to express my gratitude for the great collaboration with the fantastic team at Messe Düsseldorf. Malte! We at UAV DACH are proud to be co-host of XPONENTIAL Europe. And we are proud of what we have accomplished together with you, your team and, of course, with our amazing colleagues from AUVSI.

We are deeply convinced that we can achieve more together than alone. And that we are all together responsible for advancing our industry and this event.

And that is what we at UAV DACH work on every day: at the national level, in Brussels, in Montreal, and in dialogue with companies, investors, ministries, politics, and authorities.

We are the voice of this industry – and we will raise it even louder in the future. Commercial aviation has proven over decades that large systems work when we think about safety and scaling together – not against each other. When fair competition is enabled, and responsibility is clearly established. When we talk not just about risks, but rather and more often about the enormous opportunities of this industry

This is exactly our task here.

Let us use these days to finalize solutions, forge international alliances with our friends from the US, UK, Africa, Australia, Ukraine, Taiwan, Israel, etc., and gain momentum: In the civil market. In the public safety sector. In the defense context. Because the vision of 100,000 drones commercially operating daily over Europe should not only become a reality, these drones should be developed, produced, and safely operated in Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen, I look forward to intense discussions, new partnerships, and solutions that advance our industry. Welcome to the European flagship show, XPONENTIAL Europe. Welcome to the leading platform for regulation, the EUROPEAN DRONE FORUM. Let us together write the next chapter in the history of commercial uncrewed aviation.

Thank you!