

'Euro-drone' project gets lift-off to challenge US

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The scheme for a pilotless aircraft built by the three EU powers could be worth up to a billion euros (\$1.2 billion) if it gets airborne, officials said after the deal was signed in Brussels

A European project to build a military drone by 2025 took wing on Monday as Germany, France and Italy signed a deal to start technical work and end their reliance on US- and Israeli-made models.

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worth up to a billion euros (\$1.2 billion) if it gets airborne, officials said after the deal was signed in Brussels.

"The goal of the Euro-[drone](#) is that we can decide by ourselves in Europe on what we use it, where we deploy the Euro-drone and how we use it," German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen said.

"This makes us, the Europeans, independent."

For a decade, European powers have tried and failed to come up with a common drone project, meaning that Britain, Italy and France currently use US-made Reaper drones. Germany and France also use Israeli-built machines.

The three countries first agreed to cooperate on an [unmanned aerial vehicle](#) (UAV) in 2013.

The medium-altitude, long-endurance European drone will be designed for intelligence and reconnaissance missions and will be able to carry a "variety of payloads," according to a statement after the signing.

Airbus, France's Dassault Aviation and Italy's Alenia Aermacchi are behind the proposal.

French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the Euro-drone deal was a "very important step for European cooperation."

Other European countries including Spain and Poland could get involved at a later stage, officials said.

The two-year technical assessment will try to find common ground between Germany, France and Italy on operational needs, performance, timing and cost, they said.

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