
PRESS NOTE

CUGS project marks major step forward for european unmanned ground capabilities

Rome, 21/10/2026 - The Combat Unmanned Ground System (CUGS) project has successfully reached its final major milestone, demonstrating the progress achieved in the development of next-generation uncrewed technologies for ground operations. Funded by the European Defence Agency (EDA) and coordinated by Leonardo, CUGS is the EDA's largest research and technology initiative in this sector, **aimed at developing and validating new uncrewed technologies for land operations.**

During the project's final demonstration, several remotely operated systems developed by the partner countries were tested in simulated operational scenarios. **The tests demonstrated their full interoperability and highlighted the potential of European cooperation in developing technologies based on a common open architecture.**

The three simulated scenarios brought together the Lince VTLM-2 with Hitrole (IDV and Leonardo, Italy), Themis (Milrem, Estonia) with Hornet (Arquus, France), ZSMU 1276 (Zakłady Mechaniczne Tarnów, Poland), Wiesel (Rheinmetall, Germany), Scout Vehicle (WAT and PIAP research institutions, Poland), Patria AMV (Patria, Finland), Scout UAV (Thales, France), and loitering munitions systems (MBDA) in a complex operational environment, with the Command Post located several kilometres away from the operational area. Each system was deployed at a different location, and all were tasked with reaching and identifying a number of simulated potential threats.

The combat functional modules developed as part of the project and integrated onboard the uncrewed vehicles provided **autonomous navigation—including situational awareness through the use of onboard sensors—as well as Communication-Command-Control and Cooperation capabilities and effector management capabilities.** The land and aerial systems were therefore able to autonomously move, detect, track, classify, and engage targets, supported by Artificial Intelligence and under the continuous supervision of human operators (human-in-the-loop), who could take control of the platforms involved at any time.

Leonardo's role as Coordinator of this project, building on its leadership across other major European defence programmes, further strengthens the company's position as a key international hub for land defence.

Note for the editors:

On 2023, the European Defence Agency (EDA) has launched its largest Research and Technology project to develop highly autonomous combat unmanned ground systems. The project, Combat Unmanned Ground Systems (CUGS), brings together nine member states and 28 European industry partners. With a €35.5 million budget and running for 36 months, CUGS aims to define, design and develop a set of functional modules which will be mounted on to existing platforms. The final phase of the project will test full demonstrators for highly autonomous combat unmanned ground systems.

Leonardo is an international industrial group that develops multi-domain technological capabilities for global security. A key player in the major strategic programmes in Aerospace, Defence and Security, it employs over 62,000 people worldwide and operates in the Electronics, Helicopters, Aircraft, Cyber & Security and Space sectors. The company has a significant industrial presence in Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland and the United States, and is active in 150 countries also through subsidiaries, joint ventures and investees. Leonardo is a technological and industrial partner to Governments, Defence Administrations, Institutions and businesses. Listed on the Milan Stock Exchange (LDO), in 2025 Leonardorecorded new orders of €23.8 billion, an order backlog of €46.6 billion and consolidated revenues of €19.5 billion. Included in the MIB ESG Index, the company has also been part of the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices (DJSI) since 2010.

