European Union Aviation Safety Agency

FAQ n.116449

FAQs:

Regulations on UAS (drone) explained, Provisions applicable to both ‘open’ and ’specific’ category, Drones (UAS), Regulations

Question:

What is the difference between autonomous and automatic drone?

Answer:

An **autonomous** drone is able to conduct a safe flight without the intervention of a pilot. It does so with the help of artificial intelligence, enabling it to cope with all kinds of unforeseen and unpredictable emergency situations.

This is different from **automatic** operations, where the drone flies pre-determined routes defined by the drone operator before starting the flight. For this type of drone, it is essential for the remote pilot to take control of the drone to intervene in unforeseen events for which the drone has not been programmed.

While **automatic** drones are allowed in all **categories, autonomous** drones are not allowed in the ’open’ category.

Autonomous drones need a level of verification of compliance with the technical requirements that is not compatible with the system put in place for the ’open’ category. Autonomous operations are, instead, allowed in the ’specific’ category, where the Regulation includes a tool flexible enough to verify requirements with the appropriate level of robustness.

Autonomous operations are also allowed in the ’certified’ category.

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Link:

https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/faq/116449