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E-003151/2025

Answer given by Mr Várhelyi
on behalf of the European Commission
(20.10.2025)

Article 9 of the Sustainable Use of pesticides Directive (SUD)¹ allows Member States, by way of derogation from the general ban, to issue approvals under specific conditions to allow aerial spraying of plant protection products (PPPs), including by drones. Several Member States already issued such approvals.

The Commission will further discuss with the Member States how to simplify the administration of these derogations, especially for drones. The Commission also intends to consider possible measures in this area in the context of the simplification efforts announced in the Vision for Agriculture and Food.

Various Horizon Europe projects² have been addressing this topic. Notably, ICAERUS³, SPADE⁴ and the recently concluded CHAMELEON⁵ project have tested the use of unmanned aerial vehicles solutions, including drones, for spraying and other uses in agriculture.

In accordance with the EU aviation safety legislation, drone operations are allowed following a risk assessment, considering factors such as the drone's weight, payload and the population density of the area, with the operational authorisation setting the conditions and limitations for the operation. The European Aviation Safety Agency has issued pre-defined risk assessment PDRA-G01⁶ to support specific category beyond visual line of sight operations, including those typically carried out in agricultural and forestry environments, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2019/947⁷. This does not address the use of PPPs, which are governed by SUD. Further facilitation may be considered where justified by emerging operational needs or new use cases.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2009/128/oj/eng>.

² https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en.

³ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060643>.

⁴ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060778>.

⁵ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060529>.

⁶ <https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/domains/drones-air-mobility/operating-drone/specific-category-civil-drones/predefined-risk-assessment-pdra>.

⁷ http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_impl/2019/947/oj.