



## Benidorm hosts the first simultaneous operation in Europe of an air taxi with drones in an urban environment and U-Space

- ENAIRe takes part in Europe's first flight of an air taxi and drones in an urban environment
- Passenger-carrying unmanned aerial vehicles are getting closer
- Today, a pioneering simultaneous flight demonstration of an air taxi and drones took place in Benidorm, marking the first of its kind in Europe under the European U-ELCOME project

**Madrid, 27 February 2025**

This morning, Benidorm hosted Europe's first simultaneous flight of an air taxi and drones in a real urban environment, with three U-space service providers. The Poniente and Levante beaches provided the setting for an aerial demonstration, coordinated by the Universitat Politècnica de València, at which an EH216-S air taxi – an unmanned aerial vehicle for passenger transport – from the company EHang, with a capacity for two people, was operated simultaneously alongside 12 drones simulating various operations, from goods transport and delivery to surveillance and rescue tasks, as well as with different manned aircraft. All of them were monitored and supervised by digital and automated platforms of the European unmanned airspace management system (U-space), which ensured flight safety and operational efficiency.

This great aerial demonstration, the first of its kind in Europe, is part of the European project U-ELCOME (CEF-T-2021-SIMOBGEN-SESAR-DSDU-WORKS), involving 51 partners from three countries – Spain, France, and Italy – all coordinated by EUROCONTROL. Its aim is to integrate and validate the first U-space services (drone air traffic management) in Europe, and to achieve this, several large-scale demonstrations are being carried out under real flight conditions in Spain, France and Italy.

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PRESS RELEASE





# PRESS RELEASE

*"The first flight of the Ehang EH216-S air taxi in an urban environment in Europe, although without passengers, is a crucial step towards Urban Air Mobility (UAM), which will enable progress in the regulation, technology and infrastructure needed to make it a reality in this decade. The management of airspace for flights involving multiple drones is key to its success",* noted Israel Quintanilla, director of the Official Drone Commission at the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV) and project coordinator in the Valencian Community.

Benidorm was selected as one of the first European cities where actions of this kind are being carried out, and it could become one of the first cities where drone applications in urban environments become a reality. *"In 2016, we committed to this technology by incorporating it into the operations of the local police, the first in Spain to be declared a drone operator. Since then, with the support of the Universitat Politècnica de València, we have continued making progress to consolidate our leading position in a future-oriented sector, offering our airspace to the European U-ELCOME project, unique in Europe for its concentration of tall buildings, making it the perfect laboratory to test various applications of unmanned aerial transport",* highlighted Antonio Pérez, Mayor of Benidorm. Furthermore, by hosting the first air taxi flight test in Europe, "Benidorm is once again pioneering, marking a new milestone in drone navigation".

Victoria Jing Xiang, COO of EHang for Europe and Latin America, also noted that this flight represents a major step forward in the integration of unmanned aerial systems in urban environments: *"The successful operation of our flagship aircraft, the EH216-S, in coordination with multiple drones under a U-Space system, demonstrates the feasibility of safe, efficient and sustainable urban air mobility solutions. We are delighted to participate and contribute with our technology to the U-ELCOME project, as well as to collaborate with the city of Benidorm and the Universitat Politècnica de València to drive the future of air transport".*

*"For the first time, under the U-space digital environment, drones were safely operated simultaneously with an air taxi with multiple U-space Service Providers (USSP): ENAIRe, ITG, and UAB",* added Gonzalo Alonso, Head of the Commercial Division and International Business Development at ENAIRe, and leader of the Spanish U-ELCOME cluster.



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The aerial demonstration held today in Benidorm, led by the Universitat Politècnica de València, was made possible thanks to public-private collaboration and the coordinated work between the UPV, EHang, the City Council of Benidorm, EUROCONTROL, ENAIRe, the Spanish Aviation Safety Agency (AESA), the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, the Technological Institute of Galicia (ITG), the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), the National Police of Alicante, the PEGASO team of the Civil Guard, the Valencian Community's Regional Police, the Customs Unit of Alicante, the Firefighters of the City of Valencia, Telefónica, UAV Works, and the local police of Benidorm, Cullera, Finestrat, Jávea and Valencia, as well as the participation of the local audiovisual company Mediterra Cinema in the aerial drone recording of the event.

### Key to the safe integration of drones

The U-ELCOM project, which will conclude at the end of this year, is crucial for promoting the safe integration of drones through the use of U-space services, and contributes to laying the foundations for a future with more connected and sustainable cities.

To achieve this, all project partners have been working for three years on the development and validation of drone airspace management services in urban environments, enabling operations and applications in cities that would otherwise not be possible.

### What is needed for us to see air taxis like today's in our cities?

As explained by Israel Quintanilla, the implementation of air taxis in our cities, while getting closer, still needs to overcome various aspects related to both regulation and infrastructure, as well as social acceptance.

*"Air taxis, as a new paradigm of air transport, require specific regulation, which is currently being developed in Europe. In addition, new physical infrastructures are needed to allow these types of aircraft to operate, such as vertiports—specifically designed areas where these vehicles can take off and land— as well as urban planning and designs in cities that allow for these operations. And of course, all of this must be under the umbrella of airspace*



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*management systems: U-space, which enables the coordinated and safe flight of drones"; said Quintanilla.*

In addition, the professor from the UPV emphasised that *"we must continue working so society can see the benefits that drones bring. Demonstrations like the one held in Benidorm help significantly improve the public's perception and appreciation of this technology".*

On behalf of ENAIRe, Gonzalo Alonso states that the integration of passenger transport air taxis into airspace must meet the same safety criteria as commercial aviation, and that we are witnessing a significant digital transformation that will enable the operation of unmanned air taxis through U-space systems alongside traditional aviation. Which is why ENAIRe is participating in many European projects related to Innovative Air Mobility (IAM), a concept created by EASA (European Union Aviation Safety Agency).

### **About ENAIRe**

ENAIRe is the air navigation service provider in Spain.

As a company of the Ministry of Sustainable Transport and Mobility, it provides air traffic control services during the en route and approach phases of all flights to and from Spain and overflights. In addition, it manages communications, navigation and surveillance services from ENAIRe in the airspace and the entire AENA airport network in Spain and provides aerodrome air traffic control services in 21 airports, including the busiest.

ENAIRe is the fourth largest European air navigation service provider, and it is a member of international partnerships A6 Alliance, SESAR (Single European Sky ATM Research) Joint Undertaking, SESAR Deployment Manager, iTEC, CANSO (Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation) and collaborates closely with ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization).

ENAIRe has received the highest score in Europe on the aviation safety key performance indicator for four years in a row. It has also been awarded the EFQM 600 Seal for its safe, efficient, innovative and sustainable management of air navigation services.



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