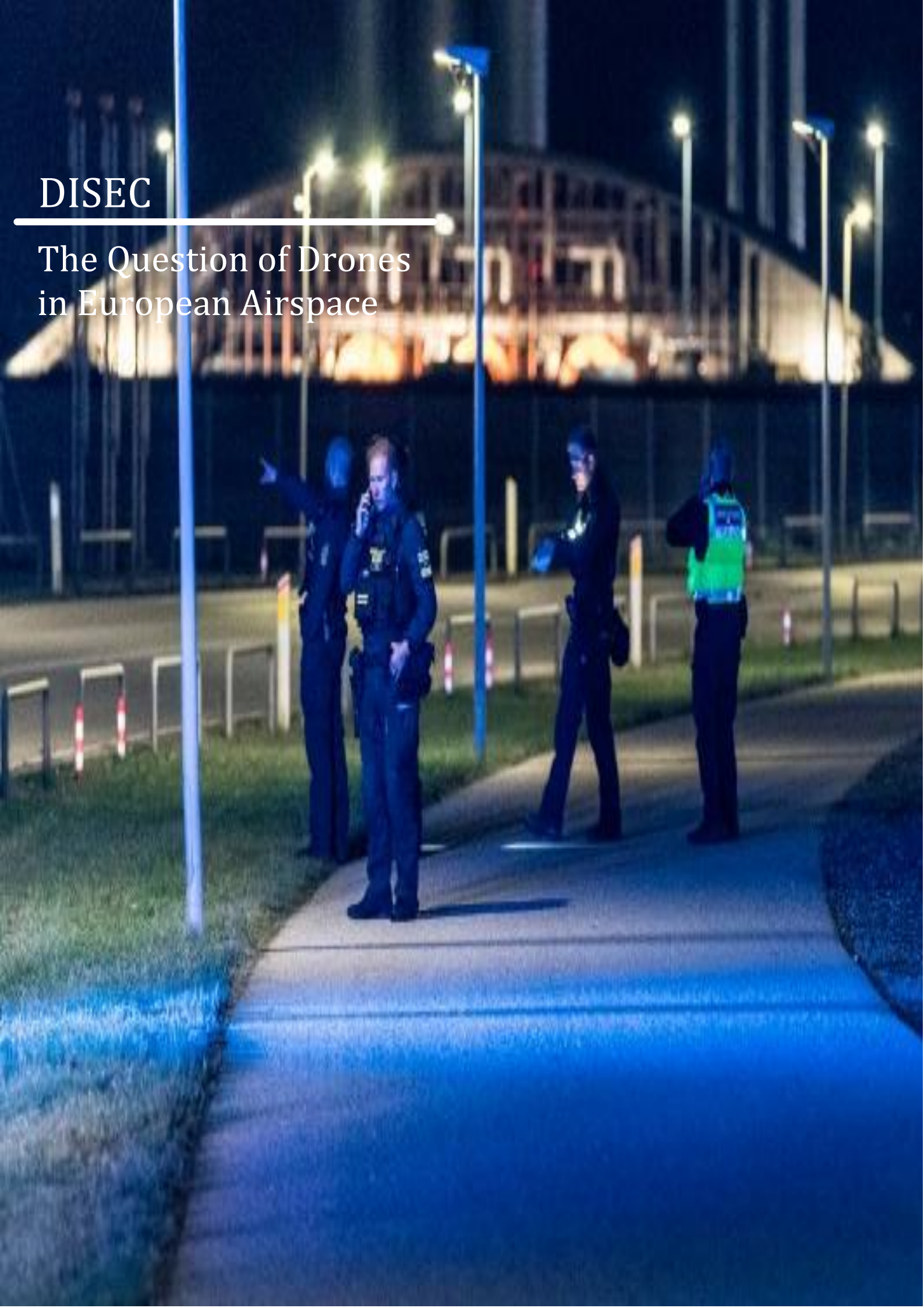
DISEC

The Question of Drones in European Airspace



Committee: **DISEC**

Topic: **The Question of Drones in European Airspace**

Chair: **Hamish Donaldson-Sinclair and Grace Gerrish**

Summary

In the latter half of 2025 there was a number of drone sightings in Western Europe, particularly surrounding airports and disrupting air traffic. Both Copenhagen and Oslo international airports reported multiple unidentified drone sightings in September of 2025, prompting flight diversions and airport closure. The sightings were referred to by Danish authorities as part of a “hybrid attack”.

Munich Airport also reported multiple flight suspensions and cancellations following drones being spotted near runways, with thousands of passengers affected. The interruptions in Germany spread to Berlin and Bremen airports, leading to brief flight suspensions. Belgian airports also suffered delays in Brussels and Liège.

While obstructions to European airports have led to increased political tensions, the drones have not caused any damage or lead to any loss of life. However, a much more serious security concern has been raised after multiple of NATO’s key European airbases have reported unidentified drone sightings, including Kleine-Brogel, a Belgian sight believed to host American nuclear weapons and NATO command areas in the Netherlands. There have also been several incidents of drones above military facilities that were publicly investigated by Belgian and European defence ministries.

Drone sightings have been reported across Europe, in countries including Sweden, Finland, Poland, Romania and The Netherlands. These have led to a proposed EU “drone wall” co-ordinated border detection and defence system, intended to protect European air space, particularly with regard to Eastern borders as many EU nations suspect Russia to be responsible for the drone incursions. The UK deployed military support to Belgium to help monitor and respond to drone activity, and Germany has introduced new legislations with plans to empower police forces to shoot down drones which pose a threat. Several EU countries have also tightened laws surrounding drone purchasing as well as counter-UAS procedures.

The sightings have led to much debate amongst analysts, with some European officials seeing the sightings as part of Russian efforts to probe NATO defences as they conduct hybrid warfare operations, seeking to pressure or destabilise European nations without open conflicts.

However, other analysts urge caution, referring to these sightings as “Gray Zone” sightings which do not necessarily equate to hybrid warfare, cautioning against mislabelling routine or ambiguous events as hostile attacks. Ultimately, the deployment of these drones is unclear in both aims and operators, leaving Europe to organise a military defence to a currently poorly understood issue.

Definition of Key Terms

- Drone – an aircraft without a human pilot on board, controlled from the ground or autonomously via pre-programmed flight paths. Note that the drone sightings were not equipped with weaponry, and instead are commercially available
- North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) – A Military and Political alliance comprising of 32 nations in Europe and North America
- Counter-UAS Procedures – Measures taken to prevent the use of Unscrewed Arial Systems.