

“Enabling innovations”: Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO) and innovation laboratory AIRlabs Austria launch partnership for innovative drone testing

Opening up new areas of application, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises - innovations drive business location

Wiener Neustadt, 29 July 2020 | "Enabling innovations" is the name of a new initiative of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, WKO, which intends to facilitate and initiate innovations in companies and to provide small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) the environment they need to effectively investigate the feasibility of innovative ideas.

The initiative is based on a partnership between the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the public interest-oriented innovation laboratory AIRlabs (Aeronautical Innovation & Research Laboratories) Austria in the framework of the "TAKE OFF" aviation programme. The programme is funded by the Federal Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (BMK) and managed by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG). It was presented today, Wednesday, at the airfield Wr. Neustadt, Lower Austria. The partnership focuses on the testing of drones in various application areas and economic sectors.

The application areas for drones in the economy are already diverse: from construction, surveying, and infrastructure inspections to logistics, agriculture, forestry, and damage assessment by insurance companies - unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) already demonstrate their added value. Drones also have a social added value as, for example, they are able to detect thermal foci in fires, blast off avalanches, or search for missing persons, help in disaster relief operations or when carrying out high-risk maintenance work. In the medium term, drones will play a key role in the mobility industry and will be increasingly used for parcel delivery, logistics, and future personnel transport, since they offer maximum flexibility and scalability and thus competitive strength. WKO and AIRlabs thus want to offer small and medium-sized companies the opportunity to test whether and how drone applications can be economical for them.

"The BMK supports Airlabs Austria GmbH with a funding volume of EUR 2 million, which allows the testing of numerous innovations for civil UAV applications and makes this future technology safer and more competitive. This strengthens Austria as a business and research location and enables the BMK to prepare the conditions for the national implementation of the new EU regulation - in continuous coordination with stakeholders from research and industry," emphasised **State Secretary Magnus Brunner**.

"We want innovation to take place in Austria. To achieve this, we need to provide our companies with the best possible support and create the right framework conditions. In Lower Austria, we successfully connect top-level research with companies within the framework of technopoles and technology and research centres. AIRlabs will also help our technology and aviation companies to bring innovations in the field of unmanned air traffic to the world market. Lower Austria will also support this process", says Lower Austria's Governor **Johanna Mikl-Leitner**.

"For innovation, SMEs need competent guidance and support. This is where our partnership with AIRlabs Austria comes in, giving our companies access to testing their innovations", confirms **WKO President Harald Mahrer**. "We are the mouthpiece and contact for our companies so that innovations can be implemented".

"Innovations are flywheels for our companies and our entire business location. They affect all industries and all sizes of companies. It is therefore particularly important to support the great number of small and medium-sized companies on their innovation path when they develop innovation strategies", adds **WKNÖ President Wolfgang Ecker**.

AIRlabs Austria is developing a nationwide, integrated infrastructure for testing UAVs. **Joachim Edel, Managing Director**, added: "We cover all development stages from simulation and validation of individual components and payloads, for example in climatic wind tunnels, material or electronic test laboratories, to actual flight tests under various conditions in numerous flight areas".

"Ensuring the safety of manned and unmanned aviation in the shared airspace is the main priority", stated **Norbert Haslacher, CEO of Frequentis AG**. "For the safe integration of drones in aviation, Frequentis contributes the innovative strength and experience we have gained from numerous research projects and our Flight Information Management System (FIMS). In cooperation with our AIRlabs partners, we want to enable new drone technology to be available as quickly and effectively as possible.

"The participation of 25 renowned partners from science, relevant industry, and the users in the AIRlabs consortium provides the perfect conditions to drive innovation in the field of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and to support the Austrian economy in this rapidly growing market segment", emphasised **Roswitha Wiedenhofer, Commercial Director**. "In doing so, we ensure that the focus is not on individual aspects but on a holistic view of unmanned aircraft", adds **Holger Friehmelt, Technical and Scientific Director** of AIRlabs.

The AIRlabs infrastructure is distributed throughout Austria, at the customers' and users' premises. FH JOANNEUM in Graz, as the original consortium leader for the funding application, is responsible for ensuring a balance in AIRlabs' activities and for emphasising the synergies between applied research, industry, users, and teaching. "In addition to the established cooperation with aviation associations and clusters such as AAIG and ACstyria, we are pleased about the intensive exchange with the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber in order to reach their members in the field of UAVs," concludes Holger Friehmelt.

AIRlabs consists of numerous top-class shareholders and consortium partners from various fields, including FACC, Frequentis, Schiebel, and FH JOANNEUM. They have been intensively engaged in questions concerning the use of drones for a long time and together they build a bridge between industry and science. This is done in close cooperation with the public sector; AIRlabs Austria is funded by the "TAKE OFF" programme, which is the national RTI (research, technology and innovation) programme funded by the Federal Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation, and Technology and managed by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG).

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