June 21, 2011

# PAS 2011: French OPV prepares for UAS trials

The Camcopter S-100 will begin sea trials on board the French Navy's Gowind class of offshore patrol vessel (OPV) in the next few months, according to Schiebel MD Neil Hunter.

Speaking at the Paris Air Show, where the UAV is flying for the second time, Hunter said the move signalled the company's presence in the maritime domain and described ongoing negotiations with the French Navy as to how the future business model would progress. Whether the VTOL UAVs are procured or leased has yet to be decided, he added.

The navy's *L'Adroit* OPV, manufactured by DCNS, is the first European solution to be designed and built to carry both UAVs and USVs, Hunter stressed. The OPV, complete with UAVs, will be handed over to the end user by the end of the year.

'The French Navy is already looking at how it can operate both manned and unmanned helicopters from the vessel and they will be able to do this independently of each other,' Hunter continued. The OPV is understood to have a single landing deck and is capable of storing a Lynx-size helicopter and two Camcopters.

'Europe is a very stringent place to fly UAVs and a much more difficult place to sell them but we are getting interest from navies and we are moving more and more into that domain,' he said. 'This is the first step in integrating Camcopter into the ship and maritime domain in Europe.

'Globally, there is a continual demand to know more about and understand the movements and actions by potential threats at sea, especially from this size of vessel,' Hunter continued while outlining future potential for UAVs collaborating with satellite-based reconnaissance, radars and other sensor systems.

Last year, Schiebel completed trials with the French DGA comprising a total of 150 flight hours. Taking place in a 'desert environment' on the French island of Levant, tests comprised surveillance in an urban and littoral locations utilising the Thales Optronique Agile 2 EO/IR payload.