Leonardo brings the Dome to Ukraine: finally Capabilities are built in Battle

Published on 14/03/2026

For years, Europe has mistaken rhetoric for strategy. It has talked about strategic autonomy, common defense, interoperability, innovation. But while summits, slides, and declarations multiplied in Brussels and capitals, **real war continued to teach elsewhere**.

This is why Leonardo's announcement of the test in Ukraine of the new air defense system **Michelangelo** is more important than it seems. For once, a major European defense group is not just presenting an abstract project but choosing to engage with the real battlefield. **If you want to build real capabilities, you have to face real threats.**

Roberto Cingolani said it cautiously, but the message is crystal clear: the first component of Michelangelo is being built for Ukraine, and the first test will take place there, “in a real environment,” with delivery expected by the end of 2026. **Not in a controlled demo, not in a brochure, but in Ukraine.** Where drones saturate defenses, where the threat evolves week by week, where air defense makes the difference between vulnerability and survival.

Leonardo brings the Dome to Ukraine: finally Capabilities are built in Battle

Capabilities are built on the field

This is the point that too many in Europe have avoided addressing. **Capabilities do not exist because they are announced.** They do not become credible because they end up in a PowerPoint or in an elegant industrial narrative. They exist only when they withstand an enemy that truly tries to breach them.

Ukraine today is the real strategic accelerator of the continent. It is the place where you understand which sensors work, which systems withstand saturation, which command networks are fast and flexible enough. **Going there to test Michelangelo means buying operational learning with the most serious currency: reality.**

Leonardo presents Michelangelo as an air defense dome capable of intercepting, tracking, and neutralizing threats across the entire operational spectrum: ballistic and hypersonic vectors, saturating attacks, low-altitude threats, drone swarms. At the center is the **MC5** module, designed to connect radars, batteries, satellites, artillery, and anti-UAS systems.

But the essence is even simpler: **Michelangelo does not sell a miraculous object, but an integration architecture.** And that is exactly what Europe has been lacking for years: the ability to bring together software, sensors, electronics, and effectors in real-time, under pressure.

Leonardo brings the Dome to Ukraine: finally Capabilities are built in Battle

Industrial power, sovereignty, credibility

The rest follows. Leonardo estimates **21 billion euros in new business opportunities for Michelangelo by 2035** and mentions **20 interested countries**. It's not just a market: it's a signal that the demand for credible air defense in Europe is now structural.

The Ukrainian choice, however, is worth more than any figure because it unmasks a long-standing European illusion: that of having security without political cost, deterrence without industry, sovereignty without risk. **Now it is no longer possible. Either serious capabilities are built, or dependence on others remains.**

The roadmap outlined by Leonardo is ambitious: after the Ukrainian urgency, NATO tests in 2027, development of space capabilities between 2028 and 2029, with the goal of full NATO and European integration by 2030. If the path is maintained, the political significance will be clear: **Italy does not want to stay on the sidelines of the next European air defense, but within the core that will define it.**

In the end, the point is all here: **going to Ukraine to test Michelangelo means choosing reality over simulation.** It means understanding that contemporary warfare does not wait for the slow pace of European consensus. **Capabilities are not announced: they are built.** And they are built under stress, in front of real threats.

Everything else is a conference.

News link: https://breakingdefense.com/2026/03/leonardo-to-launch-michelangelo-air-defense-dome-test-in-ukraine/