

Self-locking sealing device

5 The present invention relates to a plug-type sealing device the screwing of which allows automatic locking, preventing spontaneous or untimely unscrewing.

10 In aviation, an aeroplane engine requires regular maintenance and a very rigorous inspection regime in order to ensure total reliability of the engine in operation. So that the internal parts as well as any wear thereof can be monitored, holes are provided in the engine case. During maintenance operations, a plug sealing the hole is unscrewed and a borescope can be inserted to probe the internal voids and inspect the condition of the engine parts. This avoids opening the case and completely dismantling the engine.

15 The commonly used plugs of this type, also called "borescope plugs", have a screw thread and are screwed into a corresponding thread in the case, using a torque wrench. When the engine runs, its operation generates vibration capable of causing screwed parts, and more particularly the borescope plugs, to loosen.

20 Various means for avoiding such a fault are known. These means can consist of placing an insert in contact with the plug, before or after tightening. The parts used are of the lock washer type, or the split pin or lockwire type.

25 However, the plugs in an engine can be poorly accessible, because tubing and other peripheral components occupy the space around the case. Thus, installing an additional braking or locking part onto a plug requires great dexterity, and even luck, to avoid losing said part. In some cases, the plug is only accessible using a long tool, any direct manual access to the plug being impossible when the plug is in place. A plug equipped with a braking system dealing with this type of problem is also known from document
30 PCT/FR95/01461. Such a system comprises locking and unlocking means that are automatically activated by the rotation of the plug and its longitudinal movement along the axis of rotation. The locking and unlocking means are constituted by two rings (or cups) each comprising a series of teeth directed

axially towards the other ring. The teeth have a pointed (or triangular) profile and mesh together during the axial movement of the plug. One of the rings is fixed on the case, in the document press-fitted onto the case so as to be immobilized in rotation. The other ring is incorporated into the plug and
5 driven in rotation therewith when it is screwed into the hole in the case. This known plug requires the fitting of a ring onto the case, by press-fitting. This operation requires a special tool equipment.

It is noted particularly that the rotary coupling between one of the rings and the plug is obtained by mutually corresponding configurations made on
10 the one hand on the ring and on the other hand on the central body of the plug. In the device described in said document, the ring comprises pins entering axially with respect to the direction of screwing into corresponding grooves configured on the central body of the plug, said pins being movable along said longitudinal axis. In a variant, similar devices are known in which
15 the ring is coupled onto the periphery of the central body by a system of flat sections. These systems all require specific machining of the central body, which can in certain cases weaken it mechanically and/or be unsuitable in terms of achieving a compact (small space requirement) and optimized plug.

Moreover, the plug described in said document comprises means (helical
20 compression spring urging the ring incorporated into the plug towards the ring in the case, asymmetrical profiles of the teeth configured on the rings, etc.), which although providing a response to the problem of untimely unscrewing, can still be optimized with respect to their form and function.

25 The purpose of the present invention is to propose an optimized variant of the plug as described previously, responding even more effectively to the need to prevent untimely unscrewing while simplifying the manufacturing and assembly constraints of the plug. The purpose of the invention is therefore also to propose a sealing device comprising a stopping system opposing any
30 untimely unscrewing under the effect of the vibrations produced particularly by an aeroplane engine, which is directly incorporated into the sealing device, completely compact, and does not cause a hindrance or a risk to opening and closing operations, even in the event of poor accessibility.

To this end, a subject of the invention is a sealing device comprising a plug intended to be placed in a threaded hole in a case, or removed therefrom, respectively by screwing and unscrewing, the plug comprising a central body provided with a screw thread, and locking and unlocking means
5 opposing the spontaneous unscrewing of the plug, activated automatically by the rotation of the plug and its corresponding movement in the direction of screwing along a longitudinal axis, the locking and unlocking means comprising two releasable coupling components, a first component of which is coupled in rotation with the central body and a second component of which
10 can be immobilized in rotation with respect to the case during screwing, characterized in that the plug comprises a skirt rigidly connected to the central body and having a bearing zone capable of cooperating directly with a corresponding bearing zone of the second component, and in that the first component is coupled in rotation with the skirt via guide means configured on
15 the periphery of the first component and extending radially with respect to the longitudinal axis, said guide means entering mutually corresponding grooves configured inside the skirt, which extend along the longitudinal axis so as to allow the displacement of the first component inside the skirt, along the longitudinal axis.

20 The central body of the plug can thus have a cylindrical outer profile that does not require any specific machining for driving the first component in rotation with the plug. In the invention, the rotary drive (or coupling) means are located between the first component and the skirt, which is itself rigidly fixed to the central body. The completely cylindrical profile of the central
25 body allows the return means to be guided directly on said central body. The dimensions of the central body can be increased, particularly its diameter, while retaining an identical exterior space requirement of the plug. Moreover, the ring coupled in rotation with the plug is extremely compact, since it has no longitudinal pin or internal flat section.

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According to further advantageous features of the invention, the guide means are constituted by at least two protrusions angularly distributed on the periphery of the second component, in particular in a diametrically opposed manner, each protrusion being delimited, on the one hand radially by a

cylindrical outer profile having a diameter greater than the outer cylindrical surface of the first component, and on the other hand angularly by longitudinal edges inscribed within planes forming an angular sector about the longitudinal axis.

5 In this way the distribution of forces is optimum: during assembly or disassembly, the forces are thus always oriented perpendicular to a straight line passing through the longitudinal axis of the first component. The forces are thus applied in a completely tangential manner, without any radial component (i.e. projected on an axis that is radial with respect to the
10 longitudinal axis). This makes it possible to avoid or limit the phenomena of "caulking" or even jamming of the first component during the assembly or disassembly phases. These phenomena are moreover likely to be amplified by an increase in the coefficient of friction of the materials as a result of pollution and/or corrosion occurring after high temperature operating cycles.
15 Moreover, the forces are exerted as far away as possible from the longitudinal axis, allowing greater torque to be transmitted while avoiding or limiting the "caulking" phenomena.

 According to yet further advantageous features of the invention, the angular sector has an angle comprised between 10 and 45°, particularly 30°.

20 According to further advantageous features of the invention, the radial height of the protrusions with respect to the longitudinal axis is greater than 1 mm, and is in particular comprised between 1 and 5 mm.

 According to further advantageous features of the invention, the first component is movable with respect to the central body along the longitudinal
25 axis, between the second component and an inner base of the skirt, the first component being urged towards the second component by resilient return means housed in the skirt.

 According to further advantageous features of the invention, the central body comprises an axial stop against which the second component abuts
30 under the force of the first component urged by the resilient return means.

 According to further advantageous features of the invention, the axial stop is constituted by a collar machined on the central body.

 According to further advantageous features of the invention, the resilient return means are constituted by a flat wire wave compression spring.

According to further advantageous features of the invention, the first component and the second component have generally annular shapes, the second component also comprising a projection extending radially with respect to the longitudinal axis, said projection carrying an immobilization lug
5 directed parallel to the longitudinal axis, intended to enter a corresponding immobilization hole configured in the case.

According to further advantageous features of the invention, the first component and the second component comprise respective sets of teeth intended to mesh together during screwing/unscrewing.

10 According to further advantageous features of the invention, the sets of teeth have teeth with a symmetrical profile, the lateral faces of which are inclined particularly at 30°/30°.

According to further advantageous features of the invention, the sets of teeth have teeth with an asymmetrical profile, the lateral faces of which are
15 oriented particularly at 30°/60°.

According to further advantageous features of the invention, in a first embodiment the central body comprises a rotation drive configuration for driving in rotation using a tool for screwing/unscrewing. This solution has the advantage of easy, cost-effective implementation.

20 According to still further advantageous features of the invention, the skirt comprises a rotation drive configuration for driving in rotation using a tool for screwing/unscrewing. This solution has the advantage of allowing a more compact sealing device to be produced. This solution also has the advantage of allowing a larger rotation drive configuration for the same space
25 requirement of the plug, and therefore also of allowing smaller plugs to be produced with the same rotation drive configuration.

According to further features of the invention, when the skirt comprises a rotation drive configuration, the skirt is extended beyond the central body on the side remote from the screw thread and defines the drive configuration
30 inside the skirt beyond the central body.

Other features and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following description of embodiments of the invention which are in no way limitative, and the attached drawings, in which:

- Figure 1 is a cross-sectional view of a first embodiment of a sealing device according to the invention;

- Figure 2 is a cross-sectional view of the device in Figure 1 along line D-D;

5 - Figure 3 is an enlarged view of a production detail E of the sealing device according to the invention as shown in Figure 4;

- Figure 4 is an external view of the sealing device according to the invention, as shown in view F of Figure 1; and

10 - Figure 5 is a cross-sectional view of a second embodiment of a sealing device according to the invention.

As these embodiments are in no way limitative, it is possible in particular to envisage variants of the invention comprising only a selection of features described below, in isolation from the other features described, if
15 said selection of features is sufficient to confer a technical advantage or to differentiate the invention with respect to the state of the prior art. Said selection comprises at least one, preferably functional, feature without structural details, or with only some of the structural details if this part only is sufficient to confer a technical advantage or to differentiate the invention with
20 respect to the state of the prior art.

Firstly, a first embodiment of the invention will be described with reference to Figures 1 to 4.

According to the invention, the sealing device comprises a plug 1
25 intended to be placed in a threaded hole 2 of a case 3, or removed therefrom, respectively by screwing and unscrewing. For example, the threaded hole 2 is formed in a boss on the case 3 of an engine. The screw threads are standard and in particular do not comprise any interruption such as an axial groove or a flat section. The plug 1 comprises a central body 4
30 having the general form of a shaft, provided at one end with a screw thread 5, and at the opposite end with a rotary drive recess or configuration 6 for driving the central body 4 in rotation using a tool for screwing/unscrewing (not shown). In the example shown, the rotary drive configuration is a 4-sided female portion intended to receive a corresponding 4-sided male

wrench for screwing and unscrewing. Alternatively (not shown), the rotation drive configuration can be a hexagonal female portion intended to receive a corresponding male hexagonal wrench for screwing and unscrewing. A predetermined tightening torque can be ensured by using a torque wrench.

- 5 In a variant (not shown), provision can be made for said portion to be replaced by a male configuration on the outside of the central body 1.

The plug 1 also comprises locking and unlocking means opposing the spontaneous unscrewing of the plug 1, activated automatically by the rotation of the plug 1 and its corresponding movement in the direction of screwing
10 along a longitudinal axis (X). Thus, during the movement of the plug to and from the closed position, the respective locking and unlocking means are brought progressively into action, concomitantly with the movement, without any intervention by the operator. The locking and unlocking means comprise two releasable coupling components: a first component 7 is coupled in
15 rotation with the plug 1 and a second component 8 can be immobilized in rotation with respect to the case 3 during screwing. Preferably, these coupling means are of the reversible detent type. By "reversible detent" is meant a detent capable of being released by application of sufficient force on the plug in the direction of screwing or unscrewing.

20 Particularly advantageously, the locking and unlocking are carried out by locking and unlocking means, more precisely by releasable coupling components comprising a first component 7 coupled in rotation with the central body 4 of the plug 1 and a second component 8 capable of being immobilized in rotation with respect to the case 3 during the screwing of the
25 central body 4 into the hole 2 in the case 3. These locking and unlocking means are arranged around the central body 4.

The first and second components 7, 8 each comprise a toothed profile directed towards the opposite component. The teeth are precisely configured on respective annular faces of the first 7 and second 8 components opposite
30 each other. In order to avoid unintentional loosening by vibration and allow intentional loosening of the plug by the operator, the toothed profile of the first component 7 is applied via a spring 9 against the identical toothed profile of the second component 8. This results in meshing of the teeth, which opposes the spontaneous rotation of the plug 1.

Moreover, during assembly or disassembly, the operator feels the click-click operation of the device, and can therefore be satisfied with the correct operation of the locking system.

Remarkably, the first and second components 7, 8 are both built into the
5 plug and are inseparable therefrom.

The plug 1 comprises a cylindrical protective skirt 10 rigidly connected to the central body 4. Said skirt 10 is typically press-fitted/crimped onto the central body 4 by its end comprising the rotary drive configuration 6, up to a
10 positioning and locking shoulder 11 configured on the external periphery of the central body 4. By the term "rigidly connected" is meant that the skirt fits perfectly over the central body, without any degree of freedom. In a variant embodiment of the invention (not shown), the skirt can also be welded onto the central body.

15 The skirt comprises a bearing zone 12 capable of cooperating directly in abutment with a corresponding bearing zone 13 of the second component 8. The first component 7 is coupled in rotation with the skirt 10 via guide means 14, 15 configured on the periphery of the first component 7 that extend radially with respect to the longitudinal axis X. Said guide means 14, 15 enter
20 grooves 16 that have a corresponding shape and are formed on the inside of the skirt 10. The grooves 16 extend along the longitudinal axis X so as to allow the displacement of the first component 7 on the inside of the skirt, along the longitudinal axis X. Consequently, the first component 7 is also called a "movable part" or "movable cup" owing to its degree of freedom
25 along the axis X. It is noted that the first component 7 has the general shape of a cup, ring, or hoop.

The guide means 14, 15 are constituted by at least two protrusions angularly distributed on the periphery of the first component 7, each protrusion being delimited, on the one hand radially by a cylindrical outer
30 profile having a diameter greater than the outer cylindrical surface of the first component 7, and on the other hand angularly, by longitudinal edges inscribed within planes forming an angular sector about the longitudinal axis X. Said angular sector delimiting the protrusions on the guide means has an angle α typically comprised between 10 and 45°, for example 30° as shown

in Figure 2. The height of said protrusions, considered radially with respect to the longitudinal axis X, is preferably greater than 1 mm, and is for example comprised between 1 and 5 mm. The forces transmitted from the skirt 10 to said guide means 14, 15 (by acting on the central axis 4 during screwing or
 5 unscrewing) are very advantageously directed along tangents to the first component 7, so that no radial component is induced during screwing/unscrewing. In the example shown in Figure 2, two diametrically opposed guide means are provided. In this case, an angle β , typically 90° , is observed between the directly stressed longitudinal edges, whether on
 10 screwing or on unscrewing. In variant embodiments of the invention (not shown), provision can be made for more than two guide means, for example three guide means angularly distributed about the longitudinal axis X.

According to the invention, the first component 7 is movable in translation with respect to the central body 4 between the second component
 15 8 and an inner base of the skirt 10, the first component 7 being urged towards the second component 8, towards the opening of the skirt 10, away from the inner base, under the influence of a spring 9 situated around the central body 4. The central body 4 comprises an axial stop 18 against which the second component 8 abuts under the force of the first component urged
 20 by the spring 9. In the example shown, said axial stop 18 is constituted by a collar machined on the periphery of the central body 4, against which an inner shoulder of the second component 8 abuts. In a variant (not shown), provision can be made for the collar to be replaced by a resilient ring.

The second component 8 rotates freely with respect to the central body
 25 4. However, it can be immobilized in rotation with respect to the case 3 during screwing. The second component 8 has a generally annular shape. It comprises a protrusion 19 extending radially with respect to the longitudinal axis X. Said protrusion 19 bears an immobilization lug 20 directed parallel to the longitudinal axis X. The lug 20 is intended to enter a corresponding
 30 immobilization hole 21 configured in the case 3.

During screwing of the central body 4 into the threaded hole 2, the second component 8 at first follows the rotary movement of the plug 1. When the screwing has reached a certain stage, the lug comes into contact with the

external surface of the case 3, while still turning, until it reaches a position facing the immobilization hole 21. Any additional movement of the plug along the longitudinal axis X during screwing causes a corresponding forward movement of the lug into the locking hole, until the second component 8 matches the external surface of the case 3. An additional movement of the central body 4 towards the case along the longitudinal axis X during screwing causes the respective sets of teeth of the first 7 and second 8 components to mesh together intermittently. The group (or set) of teeth of the first component 7 is driven in rotation with the plug while the group (or set) of teeth of the second component 8 is at this stage immobilized in rotation with respect to the case 3. During the relative rotation between the two groups of teeth, the latter are alternately in a meshing configuration and a tip-to-tip configuration, the change from one configuration to the other being carried out by relative sliding of the respective adjacent faces of the two groups of teeth. The first component 7 therefore carries out translations along the longitudinal axis X, inside the skirt 10, towards the rear (recess 6) and towards the front (threaded hole 2) during the screwing of the plug, which is similar to an oscillation movement. Each translation takes place over a stroke corresponding to the height of the teeth, the distance separating the tip of a tooth from the hollow between two teeth, as measured along the longitudinal axis X. It is noted that the teeth preferably have a symmetrical profile, i.e. identical inclinations of the sliding surfaces acting on tightening or loosening, in order to optimize the life of the system and better control the coefficients of friction. A suitable symmetrical tooth profile has for example inclinations of 30°/30° on either side of each tooth. These angles γ are considered with respect to a plane perpendicular to the longitudinal axis X (Figure 3). In another embodiment (not shown), the teeth can have an asymmetrical profile, particularly to give a coefficient of friction that is greater in one direction than in the other. A suitable asymmetrical tooth profile has for example inclinations of 30°/60° on either side of each tooth.

The spring 9 is preferably a flat wire wave compression spring. Such a spring has a very small space requirement and allows the plug to be made

considerably lighter, in comparison with a similar plug provided with a helical compression spring.

The plug is assembled as follows: the elements are placed on the central body via its rear end, situated on the side of the recess or rotary drive configuration 6. The second component 8 is installed first, around the central body 4. The first component 7 is then installed around the central body 4 and stacked on the second component 8, with sets of teeth against each other. The spring 9 is then installed around the central body and applied against the first component 7. The protective skirt 10 is then press-fitted or crimped around the central body and said components 8, 7, 9. The skirt 10 provides protection at the same time, by constituting the outer casing of the plug, and the rotary coupling (or drive) between the central body 4 and the first component 7. It is noted that the first component and the second component have very compact external shapes, particularly in the direction of the longitudinal axis X. Their thickness in this direction can be less than 10-15 mm. For example, the first component can have a thickness comprised between 5 and 10 mm. These examples are in no way limitative. The type of spring used, the compactness of the first and second components as well as the rotary drive means used between the first component and the skirt give the plug a particularly reduced weight and space requirement that are able to satisfy very exacting demands.

With reference to Figure 5, a second embodiment of the invention will now be described, but only to the extent that it differs from the first embodiment previously described.

The skirt 10 comprises a rotary drive configuration 6 for driving in rotation using a tool for screwing/unscrewing. The configuration 6 is formed at the centre of the skirt 10 along the longitudinal axis (X) of the skirt. In the example shown, the rotary drive configuration is a 4-sided female part intended to receive a corresponding 4-sided male wrench for screwing and unscrewing.

In the example shown, on the side remote from the screw thread of the central body 4, the skirt is extended beyond the end of the central body 4. The part of skirt that thus extends beyond the central body 4 comprises a

non-circular radially internal wall that defines the rotation drive configuration 6. Advantageously, the base of the rotation drive configuration is hermetically sealed by the end of the central body 4.

5 The skirt 10 is typically press-fitted/crimped onto the central body 4 at the longitudinal end of the skirt 10 corresponding to the base of the rotation drive configuration 6, up to a positioning and locking shoulder 11 configured on the outer periphery of the central body 4. Typically the positioning and locking shoulder 11 has a geometrical shape, particularly substantially square as shown in the example in Figure 5, which fits tightly over a corresponding
10 profile of the central body 4. By the term "rigidly connected" is meant that the skirt fits perfectly over the central body, without any degree of freedom. In an embodiment of the invention (not shown), the skirt can also be welded onto the central body.

15 Of course, the invention is not limited to the embodiments previously described and comprises all the technical equivalents of the means presented.

In particular, it was stated previously that the invention relates to a sealing device comprising a borescope plug, said device being intended to
20 close an appropriate hole through which access can be gained to the inside of the case. The device of the invention relates more generally to any sealing device comprising a plug such as described previously, whether or not said plug has other features or functionalities. For example such a sealing device according to the invention can of itself constitute a thermal sensor, a
25 vibration sensor, a particle detector (chip detector) or any other detection means.

Moreover, the skirt 10 as described previously is for example rigid, i.e. cannot be deformed in compression along the longitudinal axis of screwing.
30 The rigid skirt forms a brace supported on the bearing zone 13 of the second component 8. In another embodiment of the invention, the skirt can conversely be resilient, i.e. its structure configured to be capable of deformation at least in compression along the longitudinal axis of screwing. To this end, it can comprise pierced, slotted or folded zones allowing it to be

deformed and to return to its original shape after the release of the compression forces. Such a resilient skirt further optimizes the safety of the system by increasing the resilient reserve during tightening. It also makes it possible to reduce the phenomena of seizing of the screw thread by
5 limiting/calibrating the tightening force to a predetermined value.

Moreover, the stroke of the first component 7 inside the skirt 10 can be adapted according to need.

CLAIMS

1. Sealing device comprising a plug (1) intended to be placed in a threaded hole (2) in a case (3), or removed therefrom, respectively by screwing and unscrewing, the plug comprising a central body (4) provided with a screw thread (5), and locking and unlocking means opposing the spontaneous unscrewing of the plug, activated automatically by the rotation of the plug (1) and its corresponding movement in the direction of screwing along a longitudinal axis (X), the locking and unlocking means comprising two releasable coupling components (7, 8), a first component (7) of which is coupled in rotation with the central body (4) and a second component (8) of which can be immobilized in rotation with respect to the case (3) during screwing, characterized in that the plug (1) comprises a skirt (10) rigidly connected to the central body (4) and having a bearing zone (12) capable of cooperating directly with a corresponding bearing zone (13) of the second component (8), and in that the first component (7) is coupled in rotation with the skirt (10) via guide means (14, 15) configured on the periphery of the first component (7) and extending radially with respect to the longitudinal axis (X), said guide means (14, 15) entering mutually corresponding grooves (16) configured inside the skirt (10), which extend along the longitudinal axis (X) so as to allow the displacement of the first component (7) inside the skirt (10), along the longitudinal axis (X).

2. Sealing device according to claim 1, characterized in that the guide means (14, 15) are constituted by at least two protrusions angularly distributed on the periphery of the first component, about the longitudinal axis (X), in particular in a diametrically opposed manner, each protrusion being delimited, on the one hand radially by a cylindrical outer profile having a diameter greater than the outer cylindrical surface of the first component (7), and on the other hand angularly by longitudinal edges inscribed within planes forming an angular sector about the longitudinal axis (X).

3. Sealing device according to claim 2, characterized in that the angular sector has an angle comprised between 10 and 45°, particularly 30°.

5 4. Sealing device according to claim 2 or 3, characterized in that the radial height of the protrusions with respect to the longitudinal axis (X) is greater than 1 mm, and is in particular comprised between 1 and 5 mm.

10 5. Sealing device according to any one of claims 2 to 4, characterized in that the first component (7) is movable with respect to the central body (4) along the longitudinal axis (X), between the second component (8) and an inner base of the skirt (10), the first component (7) being urged towards the second component (8) by resilient return means (9) housed in the skirt (10).

15 6. Sealing device according to claim 5, characterized in that the central body (4) comprises an axial stop (18) against which the second component (8) abuts under the force of the first component (7) urged by the resilient return means (9).

20 7. Sealing device according to claim 6, characterized in that the axial stop (18) is constituted by a collar machined on the central body (4).

25 8. Sealing device according to any one of claims 5 to 7, characterized in that the resilient return means (9) are constituted by a flat wire wave compression spring.

30 9. Sealing device according to any one of claims 1 to 8, characterized in that the first component (7) and the second component (8) have generally annular shapes, the second component (8) also comprising a projection (19) extending radially with respect to the longitudinal axis (X), said projection carrying an immobilization lug (20) directed parallel to the longitudinal axis (X), intended to enter a corresponding immobilization hole (21) configured in the case (3).

10. Sealing device according to any one of claims 1 to 9, characterized in that the first component (7) and the second component (8) comprise respective sets of teeth intended to mesh together during screwing/unscrewing.

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11. Sealing device according to claim 10, characterized in that the sets of teeth have teeth with a symmetrical profile, the lateral faces of which are inclined particularly at 30°/30°.

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12. Sealing device according to claim 10, characterized in that the sets of teeth have teeth with an asymmetrical profile, the lateral faces of which are inclined particularly at 30°/60°.

13. Sealing device according to any one of claims 1 to 12, characterized in that the central body (4) comprises a rotary drive configuration (6) for driving in rotation using a tool for screwing/unscrewing.

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14. Sealing device according to any one of claims 1 to 12, characterized in that the skirt (10) comprises a rotary drive configuration (6) for driving in rotation using a tool for screwing/unscrewing.

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15. Sealing device according to claim 14, characterized in that the skirt is extended beyond the central body on the side remote from the screw thread and defines the drive configuration inside the skirt beyond the central body.

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