

Governmental Satellite Communications



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The importance of networks in today's globalised world cannot be overestimated. In fact, satellite communications (SATCOM) have become critical elements for defence, security, humanitarian, emergency response or diplomatic communications. Satellite communications are a key enabler for civil and military missions/operations in particular in remote and austere environments with little or no infrastructure. With increasing dependence on highly sensitive information for decision-making and, as an illustration, secured satellite links for remote operation of unmanned systems, secure and highly available connectivity in a resilient network has become both strategic and crucial.

Satellite communications are generally split into three categories from a military perspective. The first category is related to protected and guaranteed SATCOM, generally provided by purely sovereign military systems, also known as **MILSATCOM**. The second category, generally referred to as **GOVSATCOM**, seeks to guarantee assured access by offering resilient and robust security traits, however less protected than the first segment. The third category, generally referred to as **COMSATCOM** encompasses satellite communications procured on the commercial market on an as-needed and as-available basis.

EDA's satellite communications priorities, as identified by Ministers of Defence already in 2011 and provided for in the Conclusions of the December 2013 European Council, address the two latter segments, through its GOVSATCOM and EU SATCOM Market initiatives.

Political context

The development of the space sector and its relevance for EU citizens has been addressed in several EU high-level political documents which recognise and bolster the role of space, and specifically satellite communications, in EU's security, prosperity and competitiveness. As SATCOM capabilities are scarce and represent significant public investments by Member States, their development requires exploring affordable opportunities for innovative governance, R&D and procurement schemes and programming and planning to ensure synergies.

Thus, the EU Global Strategy, adopted by the European Council in June 2016, the European Commission Space Strategy for Europe, launched in October 2016, and the European Defence Action Plan which followed the subsequent month all stress the importance of having enough access to European GOVSATCOM capabilities. Furthermore, in March 2017, the Council's Political and Security Committee has endorsed the document of High Level Civil-Military User Needs for GOVSATCOM, thus further consolidating civil-military synergies in the field.

State of play and EDA achievements

The EDA, in a cooperative effort with the European Commission (EC), the European Space Agency (ESA) and the EEAS has started the preparation of the next generation of Governmental Satellite Communications.

In this context, EDA gathered operational defence needs. This satellite communication demand for European actors

involved in the conduct of national or CSDP operations is described in a Common Staff Target document, which was approved at the November 2014 Steering Board. In the course of the years 2015 and 2016, the GOVSATCOM Common Staff Requirements and an associated Business Case detailing potential solutions to address capability development were drafted and subsequently approved at the March 2017 Steering Board. From June 2017 onwards, the EDA will pursue a GOVSATCOM pooling and sharing demonstration project with the aim to provide access to a GOVSATCOM capability to EDA Member States and European CSDP actors based on existing, pooled, governmental SATCOM resources.

The work on GOVSATCOM is aligned with and will evolve alongside relevant stakeholders' initiatives, especially the EC and the ESA. The EC will finalise an Impact Assessment by September 2017 with the aim to proceed with a legislative proposal on GOVSATCOM, and ESA will launch several partnership projects proposed by industry in the framework of their GOVSATCOM Precursor.

Way Ahead: Indicative Roadmap

The EDA GOVSATCOM Pooling and Sharing demonstration continues to support the incremental approach used for the GOVSATCOM initiative by first maximising potential benefits to European actors through available assets. In the longer term, the development of future governmental capabilities will be considered assessing whether they would be best provided through acquisition, service provision or sharing of national resources.

The ultimate aim of the GOVSATCOM initiative is to provide its Member States and European actors with appropriate capabilities through an innovative and sustainable cooperation model, while also exploring the potential to signal a new partnership between European defence and industry in order to better contribute to the competitiveness of Europe.

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