

Governmental Satellite Communications

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 segment is related to protected and guaranteed SATCOM, generally provided by purely sovereign military systems, also known as MILSATCOM. The second segment, 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 segment, generally referred to as COMSATCOM encompasses satellite communications procured on the commercial market on an as-needed basis.

EDA's satellite communications initiative, as provided for in the Conclusions of the December 2013 European Council, addresses the two latter segments.

EDA Achievements

At the Steering Board in November 2011, Defence Ministers identified satellite communications as two of the eleven Pooling & Sharing priorities. As a first building block, EDA solely addressed the COMSATCOM segment through the establishment of the European Satellite Communication Procurement Cell (see box) which is now fully operational.

SATCOM capabilities are scarce and represent significant public investments by Member States. Their development should be based on an early up-front programming and planning based on requirements and assessment of the most affordable solutions in a challenging budgetary environment at both national and European levels. This requires exploring opportunities for innovative governance, R&D and procurement schemes to ensure synergies with other actors such as the European Commission (EC) and European Space Agency (ESA), as well as with industrial players.



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European Satellite Communication Procurement Cell (ESCPC)

Member States often resort to commercial satellite communications either to complement military capabilities or as the sole means to effectively conduct military operations with appropriate connectivity. EDA launched the ESCPC to offer a one-stop shop for SATCOM procurement. Its added value is to create a ready-to-use cell for countries without such capability as well as a benefit for all from pooled procurement of commercial satellite communications services. Eight countries (Belgium, Finland, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania and the United Kingdom) participate in the project. Through Airbus Defence & Space, with which the EDA had signed a framework contract for a period of three years, the contributing Member States benefit from easier access and reduced costs. The ESCPC delivered its first orders in 2013 for over a million Euros.

Way Ahead: Indicative Roadmap

Based on EDA's initial findings regarding GOVSATCOM, capability development steps have been identified and proposed to the 19 November 2013 Steering Board. In December 2013, the European Council decided to address critical shortfalls through concrete projects supported by the European Defence Agency. On satellite communications, this is related to the preparation of the next generation of Governmental Satellite Communication through close cooperation between the Member States, the European Commission and the European Space Agency.

The essence of the initiative is to be incremental, by first maximising potential benefits to European actors through the assets available between 2013 and 2025. In the longer term, the development of future governmental capabilities will be considered irrespective of whether they would be best provided through acquisition, service provision or sharing of national resources.

In this context, EDA has been tasked to gather operational defence needs by end of 2014. The outcome will be a Common Staff Target describing satellite communication demand for European actors involved in the conduct of national or CSDP operations. Then, common Staff Requirements and an associated business case will henceforth be elaborated with interested Member States in the course of 2015.

This phase will lead also to a gap analysis, including the update of the Strategic Research Agenda for R&T development.

Finally, a EDA proposal, including the handover to appropriate entities for the development and procurement of the required capabilities, would be elaborated in due time.

The aim of EDA's GOVSATCOM initiative is to provide its Member States and European actors with appropriate capabilities through an innovative and sustainable co-operation model. It further signals a new partnership between European defence and industry in order to better contribute to the competitiveness of Europe.

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