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GOVSATCOM

The importance of networks in today's globalised world cannot be overestimated. In fact, satellite communications (SATCOM) have become critical elements for the EU and its Member States in support of defence, security, humanitarian and emergency response or diplomatic missions and are proving more and more valuable in the broader telecommunications landscape. Satellite communications today are a key enabler for civil and military operations/missions, not only in remote and austere environments with little or no infrastructure but in general satellite connectivity is one of the best and most reliable ways to establish communication links with a complete set of new and evolving IT services, no matter where they may be required. With increasing dependence on highly sensitive or classified 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. The EDA GSC Demo project has been established as answer to this development.

Satellite communications are generally split into three categories from a military perspective. The first category is related to protected and guaranteed SATCOM, usually 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 COMSAT-COM encompasses satellite communications procured on the commercial market on an as-needed and as-available basis.

EDA's satellite communications priorities, supported by the EDA Member States already since a decade, address the two latter segments, through its EDA GOVSATCOM and EU SATCOM Market projects.

EU Political context

The development of the space sector and its relevance for the EU and its citizens has been addressed in several EU high level 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 GOVS-ATCOM 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. More recently, and after finalising an Impact Assessment in September 2017, the European Commission (EC) proposed in its draft Space Regulation GOVSATCOM as one of the 4 components of the future space programme from 2021 onwards. This initiative

having strong links with the defence field, a close cooperation between the EC and the EDA has been established, notably with the EDA Steering Board approving a mandate for the EDA to act as facilitator in support of the Ministries of Defence within the EU GOVSATCOM Programme governance already in February 2018.

State of play and EDA achievements

The EDA, in a cooperative effort with the EC, the European Space Agency (ESA) and the EEAS is deeply involved in GOVSATCOM.

In this context, EDA gathered operational defence needs. This satellite communication demand for European actors involved in the conduct of national or CSDP operations/missions is described both in a Common Staff Target document and a GOVSATCOM Common Staff Requirements document and an associated Business Case detailing potential solutions to address GOVSATCOM capability development. Those documents were approved at the EDA Steering Board in 2014 and 2017. From June 2017 onwards, the EDA together with contributing Member States developed the EDA GOVSATCOM Pooling and Sharing Demonstration project (GSC Demo). This collaborative project, which is fully coherent with the revised 2018 Capability Development Plan and the therein defined EU Capability Development Priorities, entered its execution phase in January 2019. The GSC Demo project is currently composed of 17 Members including the Athena Mechanism. It recently expanded with the accession of the Czech Republic and Romania to the project.

The GSC Demo provides access to reliable, secure and cost-effective GOVSATCOM capabilities based on existing, pooled, governmental SATCOM resources provided by Member States. GOVSATCOM capacity and service delivery is ongoing and the project meets the GOVSATCOM requirements of the contributing Member States and in support of EU CSDP Operations and Missions (through the ATHENA Mechanism).

In light of this unique GOVSATCOM experience and knowledge in EDA, the Agency takes part in initiatives such as the ENTRUSTED research project funded under Horizon 2020 where a consortium of EU Member States and EU Agencies is aiming at establishing a network of governmental users and agreeing upon common user needs and requirements for secure SatCom systems and services.

EDA's work on GOVSATCOM is thus aligned with and evolves alongside relevant stakeholders' projects, especially the EC and ESA, by engaging in dialogues and coordinating with their initiatives such as the EU GOVSATCOM project and ESA's new ARTES Strategic Programme Line dedicated to "Space Systems for Safety and Security (4S)", which focuses on a next generation secure SATCOM infrastructure for institutional and public regulated needs.

Way ahead

The EDA GOVSATCOM Pooling and Sharing Demonstration project will continue to support its Members by providing quick and easy access to GOVSATCOM capacities and services through available pooled resources. EDA, together with Member States, will continue to remain active and engaged in the GOVSATCOM/Secure SATCOM related work within the EU and ESA and in particular closely follow the further development and implementation of the EU GOVSATCOM component to enhance civil/ military cooperation and the development of enhanced defence capabilities.

For more information on the EDA GOVSATCOM project, please watch our video.