

EU secure connectivity programme 2023-2027

During the February II 2023 plenary session, the European Parliament is expected to vote on the agreement on the proposed regulation establishing the Union secure connectivity programme for 2023-2027 (also referred to as the infrastructure for resilience, interconnectivity and security by satellite – IRIS²). Satellite communication is a strategic asset for governments and civil society alike. Complementary to terrestrial networks, it can contribute to seamless digital communication, even when such networks are absent or disrupted. Currently, the EU lacks dedicated infrastructure to offer such satellite-based services; the proposal would allow the Union to launch a private partnership for the design and deployment of the infrastructure, as well as the delivery of the first governmental services from 2024 and commercial services by 2027.

Background

Satellite communication is a finite resource: only a limited number of orbits are available to operate communications constellations composed of satellites orbiting at different levels (low earth orbit, medium earth orbit, geostationary orbit). The manufacturing of such infrastructure is also an opportunity to deploy emerging technological systems to strengthen cybersecurity, such as [quantum key distribution](#) (a cryptographic protocol enabling two parties to produce a shared random secret key known only to them). Other spacefaring nations have already launched the design and installation of such multi-orbital satellite [constellations](#).

In 2013, for the first time since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Council [welcomed](#) the preparations for the next generation of governmental satellite communications through cooperation between the Member States, the Commission and the European Space Agency (ESA). At the same time, the European Defence Agency (EDA) carried out a demonstration project (the '[GSC demo](#)'), which established a pooled governmental capability to provide [satellite communication services](#). The 2021-2027 [EU space programme](#) includes a component dedicated to EU governmental satellite communications (GOVSATCOM). It is expected to provide a satellite-based secure communication service under civil and governmental control, enabling the provision of satellite communication capacities and services for EU and national authorities, notably through the procurement of governmental and commercial satellite communication capacities and services.

On 15 February 2022, the Commission submitted a [proposal](#) for a regulation aimed at developing and deploying an EU-owned multi-orbital satellite constellation, to provide uninterrupted worldwide access to secure satellite communication services – primarily for EU and Member State authorities, but also for commercial purposes.

Main features of the political agreement

On 17 November 2022, at the second trilogue meeting, the co-legislators reached a provisional political agreement on the text. The infrastructure is to be composed of a ground segment and a space segment that may include the construction and launch of up to 170 LEO satellites between 2025 and 2027. While the infrastructure would be owned by the Union, a public-private partnership is expected to build and operate the infrastructure. Five main specific objectives are defined:

Improving the resilience of EU communication services by developing and operating a multi-orbital connectivity infrastructure. Article 5 on the infrastructure of the secure connectivity system defines the infrastructure's overall, modular architecture, which consists of a governmental and a complementary commercial part. Both parts include ground and space assets. While Article 15 provides for an implementation model based on contracts, including a concessionary contract, Article 16 (on the ownership and use of assets) establishes that the EU must be the owner of all tangible and intangible assets corresponding to the governmental infrastructure.



Contributing to cyber-resilience and operational cybersecurity. There are two main security aspects at stake. First, the security of the infrastructure as a whole (space and ground segments). Chapter VI (Articles 26 to 35) mirrors the security framework enshrined in the EU space programme (Article 33 of [Regulation](#) (EU) 2021/696). Second, the security of the provision of governmental communication services, which is specifically addressed through several requirements, notably in Article 10 on the services portfolio.

Improving the EU space programme's other capabilities and services. The proposal includes several rules to ensure linkage with the services established under the EU space programme. Article 7, defining the services portfolio, specifies that operational requirements for governmental services should take into account those laid down under the GOVSATCOM component services. Article 8 (governmental services) states that access to governmental services is free of charge, ensuring alignment with GOVSATCOM.

Encouraging the deployment of innovative technologies. Article 6 (on the actions in support of an innovative and competitive EU space sector) lays down a general obligation to support an innovative and competitive space sector in the EU. Different target groups are identified, such as SMEs and women across the EU. Article 5 (infrastructure of the secure connectivity system) mentions specific support for the EU space launch sector. Article 21 on subcontracting provides for contracts above €10 million to be subcontracted up to at least 30 % of the value of the contract, through open competitive tendering.

Ensuring high-speed broadband and seamless connectivity throughout the EU, removing communication dead zones. The objective of providing high-speed broadband throughout the EU is set out in Article 3 (programme objectives). It includes the obligation to ensure the long-term availability of worldwide uninterrupted access to secure and cost-effective satellite communication services, and also applies to commercial services. Articles 36 and 37 on international relations provide the legal basis for the association of third countries to the programme, and for the use of the governmental services by third countries and international organisations.

European Parliament position

In its [resolution](#) of 17 February 2022 on the implementation of the common security and defence policy, the Parliament welcomed the proposal on EU secure connectivity, calling for the rapid completion of this project to improve the level of telecommunications security in the EU. It also underlined the growing risk of cyber- and physical attacks on European satellites.

In its [resolution](#) of 6 October 2022 on an EU approach for space traffic management, the Parliament noted that the development of space operations increases risks for the safety of in-orbit operations. For the first time, it highlights the need for a clear regulatory framework to ensure an EU-wide level playing field for space activities. It called on the Commission to propose a legislative initiative on space traffic management before 2024.

On 29 November 2022, the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) voted on the text that was agreed in trilogue. It includes the Parliament's commitment to enhance the **sustainability** of the EU's space policy. Article 8 on environmental and space sustainability, introduced by the Parliament, includes the five criteria mentioned above. It also entrusts the Commission with the design and operation of a comprehensive database of the programme's space assets. In addition, the Parliament clarified the governance of the initiative, including a central role for the EU agency for the space programme ([EUSPA](#)), especially in the provision of the governmental services.

First-reading report: [2022/0039\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: ITRE; Rapporteur: Christophe Grudler (Renew, France). For further information, see our 'EU Legislation in progress' [briefing](#).

