TOWARDS A STRONGER COPERNICUS

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S PROPOSED EUROPEAN SPACE PROGRAMME IS WELCOME – WITH A FEW CAVEATS. **GEOFF SAWYER** EXPLAINS WHAT CHANGES EARSC WOULD LIKE TO SEE

The European Commission (EC) has made a proposal for a European Space Programme, so re-enforcing the space strategy that was defined in 2016. For the first time, it draws together the separate 'space' programmes, Galileo and Copernicus, and introduces more EU support for access to space, space surveillance and for technological research.

From the perspective of the EO services sector, we welcome this proposal. Copernicus remains our focus of interest and the proposal sets out solid plans for the next phase of the programme from 2021 to 2028.

An increased budget for Copernicus of €5.8bn is proposed, reflecting the increased scope of the flagship programme. Some are calling for the overall budget to increase from €16bn to €18bn with a consequent increase for Copernicus.

EARSC can support these calls but driven by the needs of the public sector to gather new mission data. Clearly, new data sources are of interest to the service companies.

A golden rule must be that new missions do not conflict with commercial interests. We have proposed a process to consider the commercial potential of each mission; this should lead wherever feasible to a commercial supply of services.

A service-led approach should be considered in all aspects of the programme. Where the commercial demand is strong, private investment can be mobilised. Only where a commercial market is absent should a fully-public, infrastructure-focused approach be considered.

This principle extends to the downstream services as well. As new products and services are added to the Copernicus portfolio, the commercial test should be applied to understand if the requirement can already be satisfied by the private sector. This test should be applied rigorously and with full transparency.

In the current phase of Copernicus, the spending on downstream services is €800m out of a total of €4.2bn. However, we consider that between 30% and 35% of the budget should go on downstream services.

In the current phase, we estimate that 20% of the budget for Copernicus Services was outsourced to industry. There is considerable scope to increase this for the next phase. We set a target of doubling the proportion outsourced to industry.

A further tool that must be developed further is public procurement. Sub-contracting and innovative procurement measures should be used more widely to encourage and facilitate the participation of SMEs. Better public procurement policies can help boost innovation and expanding the services abroad under the pre-commercial procurement.

Finally, a word on governance. The industry is not in favour of changing the overall governance structure for Copernicus as it risks destabilising the existing arrangements with entrusted entities. In this respect, the GNSS Supervisory Authority could make a contribution towards market development, but not to the extent of being overall responsible for the Copernicus Services.

The industry is in favour of a sustained dialogue with the public authorities. At present, the industry has no formal voice with the EC. This must change if the full potential of Copernicus is to be realised.

The EC proposal is currently being discussed in the European Parliament, with a plenary vote expected soon. The EO services industry is happy with the current proposal and only seeks to reinforce a few of the provisions in the areas described. If implemented effectively, this could provide a further boost to the industry so realising the ambitions foreseen by the fathers of GMES, which were feted in Baveno earlier this year, 20 years after they first met.

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