

Press release: UK to tell EU it will no longer seek access to secure aspects of Galileo

Instead, the UK will explore options to build its own Global Navigation Satellite System that can help guide military drones, run energy networks and provide essential services for civilian smart phones. It will also work with the US to continue accessing its trusted GPS system.

UK Space Agency (UKSA) is currently leading the work, with the full support of the Ministry of Defence, and any British system will provide both open and encrypted signals, giving it the same range of commercial and security applications as GPS and Galileo.

British Armed Forces were due to have access to Galileo's encrypted system when it is fully operational in 2026. However the National Cyber Security Centre and Ministry of Defence have concluded it would not be in the UK's security interests to use the system's secure elements if it had not been fully involved in their development.

The Prime Minister, Theresa May said:

I have been clear from the outset that the UK will remain firmly committed to Europe's collective security after Brexit.

But given the Commission's decision to bar the UK from being fully involved in developing all aspects of Galileo it is only right that we find alternatives.

I cannot let our Armed Services depend on a system we cannot be sure of. That would not be in our national interest.

And as a global player with world-class engineers and steadfast allies around the world we are not short of options.

In August the Prime Minister tasked British engineering and aerospace experts to develop options and set aside £92 million for the plans. Since then over fifty UK companies have expressed interest in the project and a series of key contracts are now being tendered.

When commissioning options the PM set out that the British system must be compatible with the US GPS system, meaning that if either were subject to malicious attack the other could provide crucial positioning information.

The Prime Minister has also confirmed that the UK is in close contact with key international allies on plans for the national system.

The UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies would be used to provide the global network of locations needed for the necessary ground-based infrastructure and worldwide coverage.

Recent estimates indicate that over 11 per cent of the UK's GDP is directly supported by satellite navigation systems and the Blackett review estimated that a failure of service could cost the UK economy £1 billion a day. Resilient and secure position, navigation and timing services are increasingly essential for defence, critical national infrastructure and emergency response.

The UK is a world-leader in developing satellite technology. Britain has a 40% share of the global export market for small satellites and makes major components for one in four of the world's telecommunications satellites. Glasgow builds more satellites than any other European city. The UK has particular expertise in security, cryptography and satellite manufacture, and has manufactured all of the Galileo satellite payloads to date.

As part of the modern Industrial Strategy the government is committed to growing the UK space sector – helping create 30,000 high-skilled jobs by 2030.