



EARSC

European Association
of Remote Sensing
Companies

Jose Manuel Durao Barroso
President of the European Commission,
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Brussels, 7th June 2012

Dear President Barroso,

I am writing concerning the delays to the GMES programme and the urgency to proceed following the recent loss of the Envisat Earth Observation satellite.

Following our industry concerns expressed in a position paper last July, we were pleased to receive reassurance in your letter of 30th September 2011 that the funding impasse would be resolved by proposals to be adopted “in the coming months”. However, notwithstanding the recent Commission note (COM 2012-218), there is no agreement yet in sight. Our industry is at a crucial stage of development. It depends on satellite data for its business and we regret the high uncertainty on what data will be available and when. The delays to GMES undermine investments made in commercial business.

The situation is now exacerbated by the unfortunate failure of Envisat which has reliably delivered data for over 10 years; 5 years longer than was envisaged when it was launched in 2002. Envisat data was being used commercially for a wide variety of critical applications including environmental monitoring, emergency response, oil spill detection, agriculture irrigation and water use, water quality, ship detection and ship routing through ice. Envisat’s loss leaves a gap that cannot be filled quickly. Some of the data will be replaced by non-European sources, which drives up industry and users costs but most services will no longer be possible before the GMES Sentinels are operational.

Whilst these losses are important, the lack of a follow on satellite will cause the biggest damage as customers are reminded that data continuity has not been assured and will hesitate before committing to take up new services. GMES was intended to fill that gap and the delay caused by the lack of funding further threatens the development of the industry.



EARSC

European Association
of Remote Sensing
Companies

I enclose two recent articles from the mainstream press that illustrate very well the concerns:

On 12th May, the Washington Post published an editorial calling on the US government and governments everywhere to pay more attention to the role that satellites play in watching the Earth. A recent report considers that by 2020, the US fleet of Earth Observation satellites will have fallen to 25% of its size today so vastly undermining the capability of man to understand the Earth and the changes being wrought upon its (our) environment.

On almost the same day, The Economist published an article “Something to watch over us” acknowledging the strong role that Envisat has played in monitoring environment change and regretting that the European governments have not planned for its follow on.

You have recently been developing the idea of a 3rd Industrial revolution and space is identified by Commissioner Antonio Tajani as being a key sector. On behalf of a growing and important industry, we urge you to take all the necessary steps to find the funding for GMES as a European programme funded within the Union budget. A first and very important step would be to encourage ESA to launch the first Sentinel satellites as early as possible,

Yours sincerely,



Han Wensink
Chairman
European Association of Remote Sensing Companies (EARSC)