



EARSC statement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, and resulting impact on the Copernicus programme

The European Association of Remote Sensing Companies (EARSC) is the European organisation which promotes the use of Earth Observation (EO) technology and represents the interests of the geo-information services sector in Europe. We have 101 members from 23 countries covering the full EO services value chain including commercial operators of EO satellites, data resellers, value-adding companies, geospatial information suppliers, consultancies and system/software providers.

As such, EARSC is deeply concerned about the potential impact upon the Copernicus programme should the United Kingdom cease to be a full participant and contributor to the programme. This brief statement sets out our views on the subject and articulates our desired outcome, which is to see the UK continue to contribute and participate fully in the programme.

The key arguments in support of this are as follows:

- Firstly, the UK government has invested significantly in Copernicus since the start of the programme, both via European Space Agency and European Commission programmes. This investment has benefited the programme substantially and has in part enabled its achievements to date. The Copernicus programme will benefit if this were to continue, as it will be able to exploit a larger financial envelope with the UK as a contributor.
- Secondly, the UK EO industry has contributed strongly with technical skills and capability since the start of the programme, making a significant contribution to its overall success. Copernicus would be able to achieve more with continued UK participation than without it, and the UK EO industry has the technical skills and industrial capacity to continue supporting the programme strongly.
- Thirdly, there are many successful pan-European partnerships and collaborations between EU and UK organisations in both the upstream and downstream elements of the Copernicus programme. Customers in the UK and the EU could lose access to specialist suppliers for both UK companies in the EU and EU companies in the UK. Partnerships developed in the business, in research and in scientific exploitation would suffer significant disruption and setbacks if the UK is no longer able to participate. UK research expertise in climate change has been extremely valuable to Copernicus.



In a recent UK government white paper¹, the UK indicates its interest to continue partnerships with the EU in space, including in particular the Copernicus programme. EARSC strongly supports this. There is precedent for this as Norway and Iceland have similarly negotiated participation to Copernicus despite being outside the EU. Financially, it should be attractive for the EU to maintain the UK financial and technical contributions, whilst the UK would continue to benefit from the data and information streams which Copernicus and its Sentinels generate, and from continued participation in Copernicus projects and contracts. We appreciate that relationships with the agencies, not all of which are under EU governance, entrusted with the responsibility to deliver Copernicus Services would need to be negotiated by the UK on a case by case basis.

EARSC would welcome the continued participation of the UK in the Copernicus programme following the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union, with the UK continuing to make a financial contribution to the programme and with UK industry continuing to be able to participate fully in EU-funded Copernicus projects and contracts. We would strongly encourage the UK Government and European Commission representatives to negotiate and reach agreement on such an arrangement as a high priority. Urgent clarification on the intended future arrangement would help to avoid disruption to current business arrangements.

Brussels, September 2018.

European Association of Remote Sensing Companies - EARSC:

EARSC represents the Earth Observation geo-information services sector in Europe with today 101 members (92 full members and 9 observers), coming from 23 countries covering the full EO services value chain including commercial operators of EO satellites, resellers of data, value-adding companies, geospatial information suppliers, consultancies and system/software providers. The sector plays a key role in providing value-added, geo-spatial information to its customers in Europe and the world. In 2016, the sector revenue in Europe was over €1.2b giving work to 7700 highly skilled employees; The sector is dominated by SME's with over 95% of the companies having less than 50 and over 60% less than 10 persons employed.

This paper has been prepared and issued by the EARSC board of directors on behalf of the members of EARSC which are commercial companies, coming from Member States of the EU or ESA, providing services (including consultancy) or supplying equipment in the field of remote sensing or using EO data.

¹ The UK Government White paper (see Section 3.4.5 on Space, Para 52) can be found at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/725288/The_future_relationship_between_the_United_Kingdom_and_the_European_Union.pdf