

Brussels, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020

European Commission,  
Rue de la Loi, 200  
B-1049 Brussels,

Dear Commissioner Breton,

EARSC – the European Association of Remote Sensing Companies – is the voice of the European Earth Observation (EO) services industry. Our 120 members are companies which either provide or are working with data coming from satellites, aircraft and drones. Such data is being used around the world for diverse applications delivering wide benefits to citizens and society. This industry is your key partner for the Copernicus Programme, working to deliver the services used by the public and commercial sectors across Europe as well as developing businesses and jobs from using Sentinel/Copernicus Contributing Missions data and Copernicus Services.

As well as meeting needs of European policy makers, Copernicus is underpinning rapid growth in the EO services industrial sector. Our studies of the industry show continued and sustained growth of 10% per annum with many SMEs and start-ups right across Europe. It is a global industry, operating in a global market but where many countries (including US, China, India and others) aspire to secure their position. Thanks to European efforts through ESA, the EC and the Member States, the European industry is very well placed and well appreciated as an international partner.

We write now to draw your attention to the difficulties being faced by the sector in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This sector, more than any other, depends on government and industry working together. Consequently, it is imperative that we work together to prepare for the moment when economies across Europe can be relaunched.

EO plays an increasingly important role in the value chain of many industries. Intelligence on global supply chains, information on the state of infrastructure, for farmers, to support reactions in times of crisis as well as on the state of the environment are becoming vital for operational decision making in many industries. Ongoing business disruption in other sectors will propagate to EO services, undoing years of investment made by EARSC members and by the EU and its Member States.

The Copernicus and Galileo European flagship programmes are essential pillars for many EU policies such as the Green Deal, International Development and Humanitarian Aid, Immigration and Border Control, Emergency Response and others. In addition, as EU flagships they provide instruments through which the EC can intervene directly.

Furthermore, COVID-19 demonstrates systematic vulnerabilities and Copernicus provides much-needed information on the global situation, supporting the resilience and non-dependence of Europe.

This is why, the Copernicus Programme should be seen as a part of Europe's critical infrastructure providing data in times of emergencies and instability. Sustained funding is necessary to maintain this European capability.

But, in addition to heavy revenue losses as public and private budgets are squeezed, the sector faces a strong pressure on investment and financing. To survive, companies need access to sustainable finance. To recover, companies will need to be sustained and primed ready to deliver needed intelligence services in a new, post-pandemic world.

Hence, we ask you to consider three points as discussions advance surrounding the EU budgets for next year and beyond:

- The EO sector is at an early and sensitive stage of its development. It offers great potential to provide high quality business and jobs in the next decade which can support many of Europe's ambitions. Today, it is at risk through loss of commercial business coming from other sectors deeply touched by the impact of COVID-19.
- Copernicus is a very important lever, matching public needs whilst helping economic and business growth. As a key component of Europe's critical infrastructure and provider of critical information on the global situation it is imperative that the budget for Copernicus 2.0 should be maintained.
- There is likely to be strong competition for finance and investment from many different public and private actors. The necessary actions should be taken to avoid strangling this key strategic sector by cutting off opportunities through lack of finance.

We shall be happy to develop the thoughts expressed in this letter further. We are in regular contact with your services and we shall also be pleased to discuss directly with yourself or nominated persons.

Finally, I really hope that you and the EC staff will come through this crisis in good health and with limited disruption,

Yours sincerely,



Chetan Pradhan  
Chairman of the Board of EARSC