EARSC
European Association of Remote Sensing Companies

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EARSC Perspective on the European Data Union Strategy

The European Association of Remote Sensing Companies (EARSC) strongly supports the European Commission's ambition to establish a unified, simplified, and trusted framework for data governance and innovation through the European Data Union Strategy. Building on our experience supporting EU goals of bolstering climate adaptation, environmental governance, and digital transformation, we believe that Earth Observation (EO) has a vital role to play in enabling secure, interoperable, and impactful data use across sectors and European regions.

EO already constitutes a strategic asset within the European data economy. As such, EARSC supports the efforts outlined in the Call for Evidence to foster investments in the data technologies to streamline the use and availability of data. The European EO industry provides data and services that add value to a number of sectors, which support decision making through domains such as agriculture, energy, water management, disaster resilience, public health, and insurance, among others. The majority of this data is provided at European, regional, or local levels, and on a cost-effective basis. In the context of climate adaptation, EO has filled critical information gaps, particularly in spatial risk assessment and infrastructure planning. Easier and better access to data for European companies and start-ups would further promote the resilience and competitiveness of the European EO, supporting them in improving their capabilities and offerings, to the benefit of the stakeholders who utilise them.

To fully realise this potential, it is essential that EO is fully integrated into the architecture of European data spaces, digital infrastructures, and AI systems. This includes formally recognising EO as a trusted and high-quality source of data. It also requires embedding standards and the FAIR data principles into EU data governance mechanisms. Bridging EO with administrative, statistical, and in situ data will be key to fostering interoperability and producing enriched, actionable insights across sectors which aligns with the goals of the European Data Union of creating inclusive, trustworthy, and actionable data ecosystems that support societal challenges.

The integration of EO data could offer tangible and significant advantages in the process of generative AI development as well, with the list of potential benefits going both ways. On one hand, the use of AI solutions in EO data processing contributes to accurate and high-quality utilisation of satellite-derived data and helps tailor the outputs to the needs of the end users, thus, offering valuable tools for European businesses and local authorities. On the other hand, EO data presents a valuable opportunity for the improvement of the training processes of generative AI and, therefore, can significantly contribute to the performance of AI models especially in the fields of climate, agriculture, civil security, defence, and many others. Integrating EO into the European Data Union Strategy can also support the modernisation of other data sources and sectors, such as official statistics and sustainable development monitoring frameworks. Enhancing integration between different EU data sources, such as EO and the European Statistical System, further promotes resilience and competitiveness of

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the European EO sector, supporting companies in expanding their capabilities and offerings to the benefit of the stakeholders who rely on them.

Furthermore, EARSC supports the goal of simplifying the existing data environment, streamlining existing regulatory frameworks, and reducing fragmentation, which would significantly help innovators scale EO-based services in areas like climate, energy, and sustainability. Decreasing administrative burden and simplifying the regulatory landscape, while maintaining robust and evidence-based policy frameworks is vital to ensuring the European EO industry can be used most effectively across sectors, finding synergies, and ensuring interoperability across domains, allowing for better connections between services providers and end users. Additionally, EARSC urges the European Commission to ensure that the goals and implementation of the future European Data Union Strategy fully align with the future evolution of the INSPIRE Directive, as well as the newly published Vision for the European Space Economy, which outlines specific goals for the space-based data and services domain, including on cross-sectoral uptake, data access, and data storage, among other things.

To ensure the European Union delivers real value for citizens, businesses, and administrations, we encourage the European Commission to fully embed EO in the European Data Union Strategy and mainstream it across Common European Data Spaces (Green Deal, agriculture, crisis management, health). The EU should invest in public-private digital infrastructures that make EO data and services more accessible and user-oriented. EO represents a domain of strategic autonomy for Europe, and supporting cross-border EO data flows will be crucial to securing digital sovereignty and competitiveness in the global data economy.

EARSC and the EO industry are ready to contribute to the implementation of the European Data Union Strategy. We are prepared to engage in expert groups, co-develop interoperable solutions with public and private partners, and advance open, standards-based data ecosystems.

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