

IRIS²: Opening a New Chapter in Europe's Space Sovereignty

On 16 December, the European Union took a crucial step towards the launch of a mega-constellation of 290 satellites, IRIS². The signature of the IRIS² concession contract by the Commission opens a new chapter in Europe's space legacy. One that exemplifies our steadfast dedication to innovation, vision, and technological excellence. IRIS² now stands alongside the Union's state-of-the-art Galileo Satellite Navigation and Copernicus Earth Observation systems as its third emblematic flagship. Together, they showcase the European Union's determination to remain a key player in a rapidly evolving global arena.

But this milestone isn't just about technology. It's about Europe's resilience, preparedness, and competitiveness — the core pillars of its strategy for navigating the challenges of the future.

A Constellation for Autonomy

IRIS² is a tangible symbol of the European Commission's resolve to equip the continent with the tools it needs to ensure its autonomy and thrive in an increasingly interconnected and uncertain world. This mega-constellation will deliver secure, reliable, and high-speed connectivity services to governments, businesses, and citizens. In an era where hyper-connectivity is vital for our security and prosperity, IRIS² is a game-changer. Reducing dependence on non-European providers for critical connectivity, guarantees Europe's greater autonomy and solidifies its strategic resilience.

The war in Ukraine has exposed a harsh reality: secure connectivity and resilient infrastructure are no longer a luxury but a necessity, especially in the face of conventional and hybrid threats. Cyberattacks and disruptions to satellite systems have become potent weapons of conflict. In this new landscape, having an independent, cutting-edge satellite system that ensures secure connectivity is an essential safeguard, not just a competitive advantage.

IRIS² showcases European innovation ingenuity and capability. It will foster a robust European technological and industrial base by harnessing the collective efforts of our space industry, research institutions, and SMEs. It will also stimulate new technological breakthroughs and strengthen the competitiveness of Europe's space sector on the global stage.

IRIS² will offer crucial support for Europe's defence capabilities. It will provide unparalleled connectivity to armed forces services, securing the backbone of modern military operations. For example, the future integration of the European Quantum Communication Infrastructure (EuroQCI) will enable secure transmission of cryptographic keys, stepping up Europe's decisive response to emerging cyber, land, sea, air, and space threats.

IRIS²'s cutting-edge technologies will also enable the private sector to provide commercial services, including high-speed broadband and seamless connectivity throughout Europe, eliminating dead zones. The constellation's multi-orbital design is poised to expand the functionalities of EU space systems, further enhancing their capabilities.

IRIS² boasts innovative and disruptive technologies that leverage the true potential of the European industrial ecosystem. It offers new business models, particularly for SMEs and start-ups, enabling them to thrive in the digital age. As a result, IRIS² is equipped to become a future-proof system for Europe.

The total cost of the IRIS² 12-year concession contract amounts to 10.6 billion euros. Funding will come from the Union (6 billion euros), ESA (500 million euros), and the private sector (4.1 billion euros). This substantial commitment reflects the shared conviction in the IRIS² system's logic and objectives and its potential to drive meaningful change across Europe.

A Call to Unity

The success of IRIS² depends on our collective unity and cooperation. As shared endeavour, it requires the active participation and collaboration of all 27 Member States. It embodies the very spirit of European integration. It also demonstrates that by pooling our resources, knowledge, and resolve, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

As we move forward, I invite every European to take pride in this project. IRIS² is not just a technological achievement of the policymakers or the engineers—it is for every citizen who relies on secure, uninterrupted communication, and believes in a sustainable future. It is for those who believe in our collective potential and support Europe's leadership on the global stage.

Today, we are not just launching a satellite project; we are launching a vision—a vision of a stronger, more connected, and more resilient Europe. In doing so, we are not reaching for the stars but securing our future here on Earth.

Andrius Kubilius, European Commissioner for Defence and Space