



NEREUS Response

EC Consultation related to EU's next long-term budget (MFF) – Public Consultation - EU funding for competitiveness

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Since its establishment in 2007, NEREUS (*Network of European Regions Using Space Technologies*) (www.nereus-regions.eu) has been the only European association governed by regions for regions (23 member regions supported by a great ecosystem of universities, SMEs, space agencies), dedicated to promoting the use of space technologies for the benefit of citizens at the local, regional, and European levels. As the voice of European regions on space applications from Copernicus/Galileo/EGNOS, NEREUS provides a unique platform for regions to shape their space policies/strategies, ensuring that space-based solutions bring benefits across multiple public domains such as maritime management, agriculture, urban planning, and disaster response. Additionally, NEREUS plays a crucial role in facilitating access to key EU policies, including the Smart Specialisation Strategy, helping regions leverage their assets and resources for innovation and economic growth. Organized as a European non-profit association (AISBL) under Belgian law, NEREUS advocates for regional interests at the EU level, acting as an interface between European institutions, such as the European Commission and the European Space Agency (ESA). By actively shaping European space policy and programmes, NEREUS ensures that regions remain at the forefront of space innovation while contributing to the betterment of society.

Strengthening the Competitiveness of the European Downstream EO Sector

The most effective and sustainable approach to strengthening the competitiveness of the European downstream Earth Observation (EO)/Copernicus and GNSS sector and maximize the impact of EU investments is **to stimulate public sector demand**, particularly from regional and local authorities. Targeted capacity building, skills development, and awareness-raising are essential to empower regions. Public administrations must be better equipped for procurement of EO-based solutions, with improved access to relevant legislative and technical guidance.

1. Strengthen the Public Demand Side

Public authorities—especially regions—are key end users of satellite-based services. Approx. 80% of all satellite-based services are addressed to the public sector for environmental, territorial and public policy purposes.

Regions are a direct political, economic and societal reference for citizens. They are both procurers and users of space-based services, and responsible for the development of relevant policies, regarding economic growth, territorial management, and regional development. The current challenges Europe faces with respect to climate change resilience, increased civil emergencies and changed geo-political situation have their most direct impact at the local and regional level. Through a rich regional ecosystem of SMEs, companies, universities, etc, they play a significant role in new space initiatives and the user uptake reinvigorating the downstream sector and thus strengthening its global competitiveness.

Stimulating sustained and structured demand through targeted measures that facilitate uptake and help to identify roadblocks as well as policy incentives is critical. Integrating EO/Copernicus services into public workflows (e.g., environmental monitoring, land use planning, disaster risk management) in a sustainable way will provide downstream providers **with predictable markets and growth opportunities**.

2. Empower Regional Procurement of satellite-based Services and Information

Despite many successful examples and initiatives, regional uptake of EO services remains fragmented. While there are many successful use cases, Europe still lacks a systematic and widespread uptake of EO/Copernicus services. EU-funded activities should help to facilitate:

- Access to legal and technical guidance on the procurement procedures of satellite-based services, e.g. Develop advisory mechanisms and helpdesks for regional administrations.
- Support/Encourage **grouped or joint procurement** across multiple regions to lower entry barriers (transborder/interregional procurement).
- **Financial Incentives and Support:** Establish dedicated funding lines within EU programmes (e.g., Cohesion Policy, Interreg, Digital Europe) to facilitate EO service procurement by regions, provide pre-financing and co-funding schemes to reduce financial barriers and incentivize early adoption, promote joint procurement mechanisms among regions to enhance efficiency, lower costs, and drive economies of scale.
- Allocate dedicated funding to EO/Copernicus/GNSS service deployment within EU regional programmes.

3. Invest in Capacity Building and Skills

Targeted training, peer exchange, best practices, knowledge exchange and advisory support must be available to both public authorities and SMEs. Building EO/Copernicus/GNSS literacy across sectors will increase uptake and drive innovation from the demand side. Tailored training programs for regional authorities focused on satellite applications relevant to their



mandates (e.g., agriculture, urban planning, climate adaptation) will strengthen their uptake capabilities but also prepare them for procurement. Important is also to work on the large disparities in Europe as regards deploying satellite-based services and the tremendous differences in user maturity. In this respect promoting peer-to-peer exchange between regions already successfully using EO and those starting out will be an effective way forward.

4. Support Innovation and Market Scalability

Continued R&D funding and commercialization support are essential to help EO/GNSS service providers move from pilot to market. Cross-sector integration with digital technologies (AI, IoT, big data) should be actively encouraged to open new application areas. While fostering a supportive environment for innovation, facilitate pilot projects and demonstrators that showcase tangible benefits of EO in local workflows. Here it would be important to collect socioeconomic data that record the benefits in concrete terms (e.g. develop impact assessment and monitoring tools to measure EO service benefits and justify investment decisions.)

5. Enhance Global Competitiveness

Strengthen the visibility of the European EO sector globally by supporting internationalization efforts and promoting the European EO value proposition abroad.

These recommendations aim at strengthening the public demand side of which public procurement is a key element. By empowering regions in this way, the EU can simultaneously unlock demand, strengthen its EO/Copernicus/GNSS industrial base, and deliver on key policy priorities including the European Green Deal, digital transformation, and climate resilience.

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