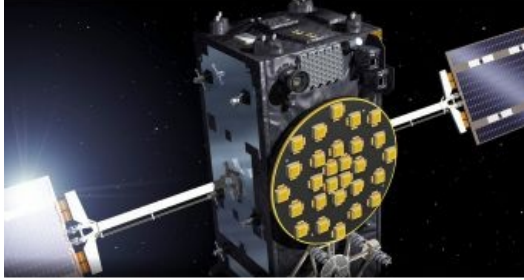


UK Plans to Launch Own Satnav System



The UK is considering plans to launch a satellite-navigation (satnav) system as a rival to the EU's Galileo project. The move comes after the UK was told it would be shut out of key elements of the programme after Brexit. The UK has spent £1.2 billion on Galileo, which is intended to be Europe's answer to the USA's GPS system.

"The UK's preference is to remain in Galileo as part of a strong security partnership with Europe. If Galileo no longer meets our security requirements and UK industry cannot compete on a fair basis, it is logical to look at alternatives," said Greg Clark, Business Secretary.

The row centres around whether the UK can continue to be trusted with the EU's most sensitive security information after Brexit. The UK's armed forces were planning to use Galileo to supplement their use of the US GPS system, but press reports suggest they will now be blocked from doing so. The US retains the more accurate and robust GPS signals for its own armed forces.

"We still think there is a 'win win' to be had here if the European Commission and the EU 27 change their minds. But at the moment they appear to be set on excluding the UK from industrial participation in the programme. We have a lot of the capability that would be needed for a sat-nav system because we developed them as part of our role in Galileo," said Graham Turnock, chief executive of the UK Space Agency.

The pan-European aerospace giant Airbus has been a major player in Galileo's development. And in the UK, Airbus currently controls the satellites in the sky - satellites that were also assembled by its subsidiary Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd in Guildford.

While Airbus will be able to continue working on Galileo at its continental centres whatever the outcome, the company said its UK wing stood ready to assist in building a British satnav system if asked.

"We've been clear that we do not accept the Commission's position and have called for a three-month procurement freeze and a clear commitment from the Commission that UK industry continues to be eligible to apply for all Galileo contracts on a fair and open basis," said the business secretary.

Officials are also looking into whether the UK could refuse the EU access to ground stations in two British overseas territories - the Falkland Islands and the Ascension Islands.