

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-000073/25
to the Commission
Wouter Beke (PPE)
(10 January 2025)**

Subject: IRIS²: Starlink and SMEs

Earlier this year, it emerged that Prime Minister Meloni is involved in far-reaching negotiations with SpaceX regarding the purchase of Starlink satellites with a view to building a secure telecommunications infrastructure in Italy. In recent years, however, there has been a strong focus within the Union on strategic autonomy, which seems to be an even higher priority for the current Commission. If Europe wants to remain master of its own (economic) security, it needs to invest in its own capabilities to achieve that goal.

In view of the above:

1. How does the Commission assess the security risks related to the outsourcing of critical infrastructure, especially information and data infrastructure, to companies whose main shareholder often uses disinformation and seeks to interfere in European affairs?
2. What impact does Italy's possible purchase of Starlink equipment have on the further rollout of IRIS²?
3. How will the Commission ensure that SMEs from smaller Member States can also play a role in the roll-out of the IRIS² network and, by extension, in other security and defence projects?

Submitted: 10.1.2025

**Answer given by Mr Kubilius on behalf of the European Commission
(24 March 2025)**

The Commission cannot comment on a purported agreement between a Member State and a commercial satellite operator, nor can it speculate on the characteristics of a hypothetical procurement.

Purchase of equipment by Member States falls within the full discretionary power of their competencies in the management of their sovereign secure communication systems.

The rollout of the Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite (IRIS²)⁽¹⁾ is not impacted by such potential purchases by Member States.

Its objectives are to ensure the provision of governmental services to Member States and to enable EU commercial services. They differ in terms of level of security, frequencies used by the system and protection of governmental users' data.

The IRIS² Regulation⁽²⁾ provides for regulatory obligations to foster competition by ensuring the competitive subcontracting of at least 30% of the value of the contract, in particular to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to stimulate innovation by promoting new entrants' participation, and to prevent potential distortion of competition.

A dedicated low Earth orbit layer of small satellites is proposed by the IRIS² concessionaire, to provide hosting services for innovative payloads from third parties.

The concessionaire will promote startup, SME, and new entrant participation in competitive tenders with clear selection criteria.

⁽¹⁾ https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-space/iris2-secure-connectivity_en

⁽²⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32023R0588>