

Decision to Exclude Post-Brexit UK from Galileo Causes Rift in EU



According to various media reports, the European Commission's intention to exclude the UK from the Galileo satellite navigation system following Brexit is causing divisions between member states. Brussels officials, led by Secretary-General Martin Selmayr and backed by the likes of Germany, want to block the UK from the project. France, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands are among the countries wishing to retain close ties with the UK after it leaves the EU. In response, British ministers are today expected to demand that the EU pays back more than €1 billion (about 12% of Galileo's budget) that the UK has contributed to the project so far if Britain is not allowed to continue to participate fully.

[Galileo](#) is the EU's €13 billion rival to the USA's global positioning system (GPS). The system, which will have both civil and military uses, was commissioned in 2003. It reached

initial operational capacity in December 2016 and is expected to be fully operational for 2021.

The European Commission last year decided to exclude Britain and its companies from future work on Galileo. This decision is based on the fact that the UK will become a 'third country' after it leaves the EU, and as such cannot be trusted with sensitive material related to the satellite project. The announcement came without warning, and was made in what was described at the time as a "peremptory manner". This has been interpreted as a major snub by the UK government, and the nation's foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, recently raised concerns over the issue with his French counterpart. France and a number of other member states are rumoured to have become more sympathetic to the British cause regarding not only the decision itself – which poses potential economic and security dangers for the EU – but also the way in which the UK has been treated by EU officials.

According to a leaked government paper tabled this week in the negotiations in Brussels, the UK is claiming that blocking British companies from the project will add €1 billion in extra costs and threaten security on both sides of the channel. UK politicians are now threatening to demand the return of more than €1 billion of the nation's contributions to EU space research unless Brussels reverses the decision.

