Copernicus Data and Information Access Service

Good news last month as the Copernicus Committee approved the plan for DG GROW to establish a new service under the Copernicus programme. Once implemented, the Data and Information Access Service (CDIAS) will finally give industry easy and efficient access to the Sentinel data and Copernicus information and create a level playing field throughout Europe.

This is something which EARSC has been claiming for some years now on behalf of the European EO services industry. We have been concerned that industry had no real means to acquire the data that they wanted. The ESA science hub capacity is limited and open to all science and international users. Only those few companies participating to the supply of Copernicus services would be assured of high quality access. Some countries are investing in national facilities but this is hardly a solution for a European project.

DG GROW propose to procure parallel services from 3 suppliers. The 3 competition winners will be required to provide an equal access to the basic data and services whilst being encouraged to develop additional capabilities on top of the basic ones meeting DG GROW requirements. We are convinced that it can act as a stimulus for the industry and enable gaps in European capability to be filled. We really welcome this approach and are looking at how the Marketplace for EO services (MEOS) could help all companies exploit the public sector investment. More details can be found in our recent position paper "Creating a European Marketplace for EO Services"..

Part of this study is to look at how the marketplace can be sustainable as a business. We look at what investment is required to develop the platform(s) and the potential revenues for it to be a profitable operation. We aim to show a feasible business into which companies will be prepared to invest.

But there is still at least one concern. DG GROW seem to have decided to split the procurement into two parts; one supplier will be selected through a procurement by Eumetsat and 2 through ESA. Immediately splitting into 2 parts runs counter to our goal to have all the data easily accessible through one source - one platform. At best this means more duplication with data stored in more than one place, at worst it means putting in place access control, user recognition, maybe even billing systems between the two, separately procured platforms - pushing up platform costs.

From an industrial perspective it greatly weakens the investment case. Firstly, there are the additional costs and risks of responding to 2 distinct tenders (however close the requirements might be). Secondly, the need to manage transactions between the two platforms also means that business costs will rise. Finally, our arguments have been based on bringing all different types of data together so stimulating new innovative products and services. If the procurement is split, this will divide the data from the outset and greatly reduce the willingness to make other data available in the future.

Even worse could be the situation where Eumetsat claim to operate “their” platform so we have one operated by the public sector and two by the private sector. In this situation, would industry be able to invest at all?