

Galileo:

EU: EU piqued by NATO warning on satellite network.

By John Chalmers

06/21/2002

Reuters English News Service

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BRUSSELS, June 21 (Reuters) - The European Commission reacted frostily on Friday to a report which quoted a senior NATO official as saying the EU's planned network of navigation satellites could put allied military forces in danger.

"These concerns are fully inappropriate," said Commission spokesman Gilles Gantelet.

"These things must be discussed between the European Union and the United States, it's not in the NATO framework."

He said differences between the EU and Washington over the 3.4-billion-euro (\$3.3 billion) Galileo system - which is intended to rival the U.S. Global Positioning System (GPS) - could not be resolved with "warnings" and "fantasies".

He was responding to a Financial Times report, which quoted NATO Assistant Secretary General for Defence Support, Robert Bell, as saying the use of some signals being considered for Galileo could put "lives of NATO's military forces at risk" because of an overlap with the GPS.

Bell was not immediately available to comment.

A NATO official said that while the U.S.-led defence alliance had no formal position on the commercial or political aspects of Galileo, it did have a technical committee which was looking to see if the project involved security issues.

"Our only interest is to ensure that there are no security implications," said the official, who asked not to be named. "There is no question of NATO intervening in the principles of Galileo and the GPS."

REINVENTING THE WHEEL

The United States has in the past expressed concern that some of the frequencies chosen for the EU network of about 30 satellites could "overlay" GPS high-security frequencies that the United States and NATO might use for military operations.

"...it would be unacceptable for Galileo to overlay the same portion of the radio-frequency spectrum used by the GPS military service," the U.S. mission to the 15-nation EU said in a recent position paper.

"The United States would be opposed to anything that would degrade the GPS signals, military or civil, diminish the ability to deny access to positioning signals to adversaries in times of crisis or undermine NATO cohesion."

U.S. officials were in Brussels on Thursday and Friday for technical-level meetings on the issue with the EU and NATO.

The GPS uses satellite signals to provide precise timing and positioning information anywhere in the world. It is a useful tool for surveying and mapping, transport, agriculture, telecommunications and natural resources exploration.

The United States has made its system available free of charge to non-military users since 1989 and says it sees no compelling need for a European version.

"The Americans don't see the point of an EU system," said a NATO diplomat. "GPS is

Office of Space Commercialization

free to user, so why reinvent the wheel?"

He said Washington was asking why its European allies refuse to spend on military equipment to prepare for post-September 11 security threats but will spend heavily to duplicate a system that is already available and free.

Conspiracy theorists in the security community believe that the Europeans chose frequency overlays with the GPS to prevent the United States jamming its system, the diplomat said.

The future of Galileo, which could curb the EU's dependence on the United States and serve its now-embryonic defence force, was thrown into doubt last year when Britain, Germany and the Netherlands refused to release the necessary cash.

But in March the EU's transport ministers signed off 450 million euros of Union money that, along with 100 million euros already authorised and 550 million euros from the European Space Agency, will pay for the four-year development of the system.

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