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Bridging Ukraine's Satellite Gap: Starlink Vulnerabilities and Priorities for EU Space Sovereignty

Summary

1. Restrictions on Starlink speed impaired Ukrainian drone interception capabilities against hostile strikes.

2. Strategic Vulnerability: Defense reliance on single foreign private providers risks sudden political leverage from external actors.

3. European Autonomy: Fast-tracking Ukraine's integration into GOVSATCOM and accelerating IRIS² are vital for regional defense.

As an independent defense analyst advising EU security plannerss, this brief addresses a critical research question: How can the European Union bridge Ukraine's critical satellite communication gap while reducing its own dangerous reliance on foreign private space providers ? Recent bandwidth restrictions on SpaceX's Starlink system severely limited Ukrainian troops from intercepting incoming combat drones, highlighting the danger of depending on non-European commercial actors. This incident proves that European security cannot rely on foreign political decisions or corporate goodwill. Because operational communication is essential for modern defense, this brief urges immediate action. It recommends fast-tracking Ukraine's full access to the EU's GOVSATCOM system, accelerating the deployment of Europe's sovereign IRIS² satellite constellation, and prioritizing European telecommunications prodivers for defense spectrum licenses.



1-Operational Shocks and Ukraine's Satellite Dependence :

Modern defense relies heavily on satellite connectivity for intelligence and drone targeting. Ukrainian forces have depended on SpaceX's Starlink network throughout the war. However, speed limitations placed on military Starshield units caused immediate tactical failures. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy confirmed that reduced speeds disabled drone units tasked with intercepting Shahed drones. Reports indicate these limits followed Washington's political pressure regarding energy strikes. This situation demonstrates that relying on foreign commercial platforms leaves military operations vulnerable to external decisions.

'European security cannot depend on the decisions of foreign private billionaires or political shifts across the Atlantic.'

2-Strategic Vulnerabilities of Foreign Digital Dominance :

The Starlink disruption highlights broader risks in European security. European lawmakers warn that allowing a single American private company to control critical orbit connectivity compromises European sovereignty. Relying on external leverage and corporate influence. Furthermore, foreign operators hold key radio frequencies in Europe, limiting domestic alternatives. Without independent satellite infrastructure, the EU remains exposed to strategic risks during regional crises.

3-Accelerating EU Space Sovereignty : GOVSATCOM and IRIS² : To safeguard defense autonomy, the EU is expanding its sovereign space initiatives. The European Commission is negotiating to fully integrate Ukraine into GOVSATCOM, which pools secure government satellite capacities across member states. However, administrative delays have slowed progress. Additionally, the EU is developing IRIS², an independent satellite network designed to match Starlink by 2030. Current battlefield shocks prove that waiting until 2030 is unsufficient. Accelerating sovereign space infrastructure is essential for genuine European Strategic Autonomy.

RECOMMENDATIONS :

To solve ukraine's satellite gap and build European space autonomy, the EU should take three targeted actions :

-Fast- Track Ukraine's Access to GOVSATCOM :

Finalize commission negotiations immediately to grant Ukrainian defense forces access to secure GOVSATCOM satellite capabilities.

-Accelerate the IRIS² Satellite Constellation : allocate emergency funding to advance IRIS² launch targets well before 2030, establishing sovereign low-Earth orbit infrastructure.

-Reserve Satellite Spectrum for European Telcos : Reserve critical satellite frequency licenses for domestic telecommunication operators to curb foreign commercial dominance.

FOOTNOTES

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