

EU developing 'militarised' space policy which could trigger 'arms race'

The European Union is developing a military space policy which has the "potential for an arms race", a report has claimed.

By Urmee Khan

Last Updated: 6:43AM GMT 21 Nov 2008

The European Space Agency is accused of developing technology to dominate the "high ground" of space, including a multimillion pound EU Satellite Centre in Spain.

The Transnational Institute, a Dutch think-tank, said: "EU-financed communication and spy satellites are slowly becoming reality and in the long term the inclusion of space-based missile defence and other more offensive uses of space are real options for an increasingly ambitious EU military space policy."

The report said French ambitions for the "militarisation of space" have led to arguments with Britain - particularly over Galileo, the much-delayed European global positioning system.

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, who currently holds the Presidency, said in June that space agenda was one of his priorities.

Next week, ministers from all ESA member states will meet in The Hague to implement a new European space policy which identifies military "security" as a priority.

Galileo would be vital in any European deployment of the sort of GPS-guided artillery now being used by the US in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2002, the EU approved the £2 billion satellite network to break strategic dependence on America and seize the lead in space technology.

Galileo was designed to end dependence on America's Global Positioning System, a network of 24 satellites controlled by the American defence department which can be cut off in war or even used as a tool of pressure.

At the time, it was said that Galileo would create 150,000 jobs, generating £7 billion in annual revenue for European companies from 2008.

British demanded a statement in 2002 to describe Galileo as a "civilian" project that would not threaten the cohesion of Nato.

However, author of the new report Frank Slijper, an economist and arms trade specialist, said: "While Galileo is generally presented as a genuinely civilian programme, it now appears highly militarised.

"The public denial of these important capabilities shows how much Brussels and many European capitals are afraid to tell the public that Galileo is to become an extremely important tool in future warfare by European military forces," he said.

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