

Defense Spending Surge in Europe Redefines Video Requirements for New ISR Priorities

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- European defense budgets are rising at a pace not seen in decades, reshaping priorities in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and pushing sovereign nations to rethink how they balance cost, speed, and resilience in modern warfare. This is leaving an indelible mark on the mission-critical role of video on these platforms.

“Much has been learned from recent conflicts,” said Mark Rushton, Global Defense and Security Lead at VITEC. “Nations are realizing they can no longer afford to rely solely on high-cost, long-endurance platforms — they need ISR systems that are agile, affordable, and built for contested environments.”

VITEC, a global provider of advanced video streaming, encoding, decoding, and distribution solutions, has become a key player in this shift. The company specializes in mission-critical applications across defense and security, delivering secure, low-latency IP video systems that sit at the heart of modern ISR workflows.



Mark Rushton, VITEC

That technological expertise is coming into sharper focus as European governments boost defense budgets and reconsider what kinds of ISR platforms best serve their strategic needs.

Germany, for instance, is moving toward defense spending of 3.5% of GDP, the United Kingdom is targeting 3%, and France is following suit. Poland, on NATO’s eastern flank, has gone further, committing nearly 5% of GDP to defense this year — the highest level in Europe. These increases reflect a broader recognition that Europe’s security environment requires not only higher investment, but also a shift in the kinds of platforms militaries are buying.

“In Ukraine and elsewhere, we’ve seen that medium-altitude, long-endurance [MALE] drones are often too expensive and too vulnerable,” Rushton added. “The emphasis now is on ISR platforms that can be rapidly deployed, retrieved, and sometimes written off. We’re talking about systems that are, in many cases, designed to be affordable and even disposable.”



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From Prestige Fleets to Practical Platforms

The United Kingdom’s Ministry of Defence is shortly due to retire its Watchkeeper fleet of unmanned aerial systems after a decade in service. The move reflects lessons learned in modern theaters where high-cost platforms are increasingly shot down by inexpensive missiles. The future, analysts argue, lies in smaller, modular ISR systems that can be launched quickly, carry only the necessary payload, and be replaced at manageable cost.

Projects like the UK’s Corvus electronic warfare initiative underscore the trend. Rather than procuring a few large, bespoke platforms, governments are spreading budgets across more numerous, lower-cost systems that can still deliver the intelligence edge militaries need.

Balancing NATO and Sovereign Priorities

While NATO targets of 2% of GDP remain the baseline, the rapid push by nations like Poland and Germany highlights a broader dynamic: European governments are unwilling to rely solely on shared assets. Sovereign ISR capabilities — with secure encryption, role-based access controls, and localized decision-making — are becoming critical.

“There are standards within NATO that allow for interoperability,” Rushton explained. “But ultimately, each nation needs to be able to operate on its own terms. Political and financial realities mean sharing isn’t always guaranteed. That’s driving investment in ISR solutions that can be independently deployed while still compatible with coalition frameworks.”

The Role of Modern Video Codecs in Meeting ISR Demands

For companies like VITEC, the new landscape has created a sense of urgency to refine video codecs and deliver higher quality imagery with lower power consumption, ensuring ISR payloads fit the shrinking size, weight, and cost profiles of today’s platforms.

“Our role is to make sure the video payload can match the agility of the platform,” he noted. “That means optimizing efficiency, reducing latency, and ensuring encryption is built in from the start.”

VITEC has invested heavily in commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) components, allowing militaries to field systems more quickly without lengthy bespoke development cycles. The company’s solutions support AES-grade encryption to protect sensitive streams, while also enabling interoperability with coalition partners through adaptable formats and transcoding capabilities.

Just as importantly, VITEC is aligning with the rise of “disposable” ISR. Its codecs and hardware are engineered to be compact, affordable, and mission-specific, so that if an unmanned system is lost in a contested theater, the financial impact is manageable.

“We’re building technology that delivers value even when the platform is not expected to come back,” Rushton said.

The Strategic Outlook

The geopolitical and budgetary realignment underway suggests Europe’s ISR future will be built on agile, interoperable, and financially resilient systems. As defense ministries shift procurement from prestige fleets to scalable solutions, the result is an ISR ecosystem designed for speed, adaptability, and coalition flexibility.

“Video codec innovation will play a significant role in enabling ISR platforms to deliver mission-critical image quality with minimal size, weight, and power demands while ensuring that the intelligence edge remains sharp as budgets and platforms trend smaller, faster, and more disposable,” concludes Rushton.

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