



Changing priorities

Philip Mason talks to project co-ordinator David Lund about increasing European-level support for EUCCS Preparation (BroadEU.NET) – building upon BroadWay -, and if the project could conceivably evolve to include the UK

The change of government earlier this summer has the potential to affect UK public safety communications in any number of ways.

While it is far too early to speculate with anything resembling confidence, however, it is possible to identify areas where new government policy and attitudes at least have the potential to result in knock-on effects. One of these is the UK's relationship with Europe, particularly in relation to security.

We have, after all, already heard about the government's ambition to establish a post-Brexit 'security pact' with the EU, with the foreign secretary travelling to mainland Europe almost immediately after the election in July.

With that in mind, this article is intended to provide an update on EUCCS Preparation (BroadEU.Net), which is arguably the most important public safety comms project currently taking place across the continent. Developing out of its initial stages (known as BroadWay), it aims to enable true broadband roaming for first-responders, regardless of borders.

Needless to say, our interviewee, project co-ordinator David Lund, was not able to comment on the current relationship between the EU and the UK, let alone anticipate what the next few years might bring. He was prepared to say what he would like to happen, however, which you will find out at the end of the piece.

Project evolution

Funded by the EU, EUCCS Preparation (BroadEU.Net) has evolved out of BroadWay, which we have covered previously in the BAPCO Journal. The most significant recent event for that project – at least in relation to the tech – was the development of two prototypes back in 2022, by consortiums led by Airbus and Frequentis.

Describing EUCCS Preparation (BroadEU.Net) as it exists currently, meanwhile, its website calls it a "collaborative effort between partners



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from several European Union member states, consisting of telecommunication companies, public safety organisations, and research institutes”.

The website continues: “Our aim is to develop a reliable and resilient mobile broadband system that can meet the needs of emergency services across Europe.

“Our team is dedicated to improving communication and co-ordination during crises and disasters, with innovative solutions that enhance the safety and security of citizens across Europe.”

Most recently, the programme published a request for tender for the award of a framework contract. The deadline concluded at the end of August, prior to being publicised via a press release pretty much as this was being written.

Going into greater detail about the current state of the project and what happens

next, Lund says: “The last two years or so have been more about the preparation of governance. We turned the attention less on the tech and more onto what we need to turn this into a real system.

“The BroadWay contract finished [and because we weren’t tied to it any more] we could both keep people together while also bringing in new countries, which wasn’t possible before. Immediately our colleagues in MSB [the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency] joined us, the Polish Fire Service joined us, and so on.

“So, we were able to build the team up, and there’s even more countries coming. It’s almost like we’ve got a waiting list building.”

Moving onto the technical and operational aspect, Lund says that this is progressing in similar expansive fashion, with the project now having started to liaise with specific national projects and agencies, as mentioned above. He talks about Finland in relation to

this, as well as France and Italy.

Discussing this, he says: “We’ve had meetings where they just exchange information with each other – ‘we learnt from this’, ‘you don’t need to do that’. It’s been brilliant.

“As we were getting towards the end of that study, the European Commission initiated the Mission Critical Communication Expert Group [MCCG], which brings all government experts from EU member states and Schengen into the same room, to establish the regulatory basis and governance.

“It is led by the Commission’s Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs [DG HOME], which is the lead service for critical communication and has supported the work we do financially, and most notably by mobilising support at political level.

“The creation of MCCG was quite a big moment as well, with the team realising this is real and that it’s actually going to happen.”

Cross-border interoperability

There will be more on the MCCG later in the piece. Remaining on the technical aspect for the time being, however, Lund says that the next step is to start procuring test beds across the continent in order to get things to the next phase. →



The project aims to provide cross-border 'roaming' to European first responders

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As readers of the BAPCO Journal will be aware, the rolling out of nationwide mission-critical broadband is by no means an easy task. Quite to the contrary, these are seriously complicated projects, as exemplified by the UK’s Emergency Services Network, which has so far taken the best part of a decade to procure (and then in part procure again), before approaching its final stages.

As complex as these national programmes undoubtedly are, however, one thing which generally isn’t an issue is the need to interoperate with similar networks in neighbouring countries. (There are notable exceptions to this, of course, such as the cross-border interoperability of Norway, Sweden and Finland’s respective TETRA systems.)

By contrast, this is exactly what EUCCS Preparation (BroadEU.Net) is trying to achieve. Indeed, it is the whole point of the project.

Discussing these various unique hurdles and how they are being addressed by the programme, Lund says: “There are many factors when it comes to building a national mission-critical network.

“You have to worry about priority and pre-emption, political intervention with the MNOs and so on. All this is tricky, but it’s more of a national concern.

“From our point of view, the national concern then becomes an international concern. Because if you’re going to put a pan-European system together, each of the systems involved with it need to operate in the same way.”

From Lund’s point of view, what he calls “the technical solutions” are relatively easy to conceive of. The thing which is really difficult, at least according to him, is motivating MNOs not already involved in emergency services roll-outs to introduce ‘mission critical’ elements such as priority and pre-emption into their commercial networks.

That being the case, rather than “going around trying to convince every single MNO across Europe”, Lund says the project will instead concentrate on the service layer, as well as operational procedures and the user side.

Going into greater detail about the testbeds as well as the procurement mentioned earlier, he says that the plan is to layer

mission-critical services over the top, at least for now. According to him, this will in turn facilitate cross-border working via the use of international roaming SIM cards.

The mission-critical services themselves, he says, “are hosted somewhere cloud-based, although we don’t know yet what will be offered”.

He continues: “In EUCCS Preparation (BroadEU.Net), we’re going to accept a maximum of four teams. It won’t be quite like the procurement with BroadWay, but it will be similar.

“We’re kind of in a grey area of procurement of full systems and procurement of innovation. It’s about technical maturity – are those systems fit for purpose yet? Do they interconnect with each other? Can we use them?”.

High level support

Going back to the question of ‘motivating’ mobile network operators, Lund says that the fundamental difficulty with this is that they tend to be driven by profit rather than by any potential societal benefit. This is not something he believes he can influence, with any change only likely via legislation.

While it is early to speculate, it seems likely that Europe might take a regulatory approach to deploy its system. It is encouraging to observe the political weight that is now being thrown behind the idea of a pan-European critical communication system however, based on the technical solution delivered by EUCCS Preparation (BroadEU.Net).

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Indeed, “a new European Critical Communication System” is mentioned explicitly in the political guidelines for the next European Commission, “to be used by public authorities in charge of security and safety”.

This leads us back to the Mission Critical Communication Expert Group. Established by the aforementioned DG Home in 2023, the MCCG works “towards supporting legislation that will be needed at the European level to support establishment of EUCCS”.

Elaborating on the status of the project as it relates to the European Commission, Lund says: “This is not just a niche thing any more, it’s now more part of a strategic approach to security and preparedness. BroadWay began as a project, but now it has provided the basis for a major policy initiative.

“The expert group is represented by each member state across the Schengen countries, with at least one representative or ministry.” Lund attends MCCG as observer, representing PSCE as co-ordinator of EUCCS Preparation (BroadEU.Net).

He continues: “The discussion in large part centres around future governance. The technical aspect is one thing, but you also need some kind of rules and procedure around how technical interoperability should work in practice.

“Most importantly, operational mobility is needed for responders to carry out their operations wherever they are; and communicate whenever they need to and with whoever they are tasked to co-operate. It’s the co-operation between responders that matters.

“Operational procedures will be investigated, learning from the

co-operation in the Nordics, as responders can roam there with TETRA ISI.”

While EUCCS Preparation (BroadEU.Net) has indeed evolved from ‘project’ to ‘policy’, it would be a mistake to imagine that it hasn’t always been a major endeavour on the part of those involved, as well as for the mission-critical comms sector as a whole. It is now being taken increasingly seriously by those in power; however, the obvious reason for which is the parlous state of the continent itself, as well as the continued impact of climate change.

Looking back at the history of the project, when the work began in 2015/2016, Europe was already coping with numerous terrorist attacks taking place around the same time. These included atrocities in Paris in 2015, at the Stade de France, the Bataclan theatre and other locations around the city.

Jump forward nearly a decade, meanwhile, and the need for an interoperable, pan-European mission-critical communications network has been brought into even sharper focus by the ongoing war in Ukraine. Between that and the COVID-19 pandemic, it really should be no surprise that the safety and security piece is now much higher on the European Commission agenda than it was.

(This is also evident in the number of joint missions currently taking place under the auspices of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, something which has greatly increased since 2020).

This last point brings us neatly back to the subject of the UK’s place in all this, which given

that this is being written for the British APCO Journal has to be considered something of an elephant in the room.

Discussing this, Lund says: “As a citizen, I would love to see the UK involved in EUCCS Preparation (BroadEU.Net).

But in terms of what this means at the policy level, I’m not sure. It’s a question that’s having to be addressed, both because of the Channel and because of Ireland.

“But it’s not something that’s going to be decided by [the programme].”

He continues: “At the moment, it’s not feasible. But I’m getting the feeling it’s becoming more needed, and also becoming more of a consideration. We are discussing possibilities for the UK to be involved in EUCCS Preparation now that the UK is associated to the Horizon Europe programme.” 

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