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COVER NOTE

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
date of receipt:	29 July 2026
To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
No. Cion doc.:	SWD(2026) 258 final
Subject:	COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Union submission to the 13th session of the International Maritime Organization's Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue proposing updates to IMO Resolution MSC.471(101) and SOLAS Chapter IV related to the Galileo Two-Communication service

Delegations will find attached document SWD(2026) 258 final.

Encl.: SWD(2026) 258 final

EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 29.7.2026
SWD(2026) 258 final

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

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PURPOSE

This Staff Working Document contains a draft submission to the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) 13th session of the Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue (NCSR 13). The IMO has scheduled NCSR 13 from 22 to 26 June 2026.

This document presents the Two-Communication service offered by the Return Link of Galileo on Cospas-Sarsat beacons and proposes draft amendments to IMO Resolution MSC.471(101) concerning the performance standards for Float-free EPIRBs and the addition of the definition of Two-Way Communication in SOLAS Chapter IV regulation 2 (Terms and definitions).

The document follows the Union submission to MSC 107 (MSC 107/17/11) proposing a new output regarding the Two Way Communication (TWC) Service demonstration for Cospas-Sarsat distress beacons using the SAR/Galileo Return Link Service.

EU RELEVANCE

Regulation (EU) 2021/696[1] establishes the Union Space Programme and the European Union Agency for the Space Programme (Article 1). The programme includes the European satellite navigation policy that provides the Union with two satellite navigation systems: The system established under the Galileo programme (Article 3(1)(a) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/696) and the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) system (Article 3(1)(b) thereof).

According to Art. 28(1) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/696, the Commission has overall responsibility for implementing the European Space Programme, including Galileo and EGNOS. The aim of the Galileo programme is to establish and operate the global satellite navigation and positioning infrastructure specifically designed for civilian purposes, which can be used by a variety of public and private actors in Europe and worldwide.

In light of all of the above, the present draft Union submission falls under EU exclusive competence pursuant to article 3(2) TFEU, as the revision of SOLAS and the IMO Resolution, once adopted, risks affecting or altering Union legislation and in particular Regulation ((EU) 2021/696.[2] This Staff Working Document is presented to establish an EU position on the matter and to transmit the document to the IMO prior to the required deadline of 17 April 2026.

[1] Regulation (EU) 2021/696 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing the Union Space Programme and the European Union Agency for the Space Programme and repealing Regulations (EU) No 912/2010, (EU) No 1285/2013 and (EU) No 377/2014 and Decision No 541/2014/EU; OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 69.

[2] An EU position under Article 218(9) TFEU is to be established in due time should the IMO Maritime Safety Committee eventually be called upon to adopt an act having legal effects as regards the subject matter of the said draft Union submission. The concept of '*acts having legal effects*' includes acts that have legal effects by virtue of the rules of international law governing the body in question. It also includes instruments that do not have a binding effect under international law, but that are '*capable of decisively influencing the content of the legislation adopted by the EU legislature*' (Case C-399/12 Germany v Council (OIV), ECLI:EU:C:2014:2258, paragraphs 61-64). The present submission, however, does not produce legal effects and thus the procedure for Article 218(9) TFEU is not applied.

SUB-COMMITTEE ON NAVIGATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND SEARCH AND RESCUE
13th session
Agenda item 8

NCSR 13/8/X
March 2026
Original: ENGLISH
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DEVELOPMENT OF GUIDELINES FOR EPIRB WHICH IMPLEMENT THE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION SERVICE VIA THE SAR/GALILEO RETURN LINK SERVICE AS A COMPLEMENT TO EPIRB PERFORMANCE STANDARDS (RESOLUTION MSC.471(101))

Galileo SAR two-Way Communication Update

Submitted by Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the European Commission, acting jointly in the interest of the European Union

SUMMARY

Executive summary:	This paper presents the Two-Communication service offered by the Return Link of Galileo on Cospas-Sarsat beacons and proposes draft amendments to IMO Resolution MSC.471(101) concerning the performance standards for Float-free EPIRBs and the addition of the definition of Two-Way Communication in SOLAS Chapter IV regulation 2 (Terms and definitions).
Strategic direction, if applicable:	2
Output:	2.18
Action to be taken:	Paragraph 14
Related documents:	MSC.104/INF.4; MSC.105/INF.5; NCSR 8/10/2; NCSR 9/INF.18 and NCSR 10/INF.5; MSC.107/17/11

Introduction:

1 This document is submitted in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 6.12.5 of the Organization and method of work of the Maritime Safety Committee and provides draft amendments to IMO Resolution MSC.471(101) concerning the performance standards for Float-free EPIRBs and the addition of the definition of Two-Way Communication in SOLAS Chapter IV regulation 2 (Terms and definitions).

2 The co-sponsors submitted the proposal MSC 107/17/11 for a new output for the development of guidelines for EPIRB which implement the TWC service via Return Link Service as a complement to EPIRB performance standards (resolution MSC.471(101)). At the 107th session of the Maritime Safety Committee it was agreed to include in the NCSR post-biennial agenda with two sessions needed to complete the item.

3 At NCSR 12, no documents were submitted on this item as the work on defining the new Two-Way Communication (TWC) via Return Link service functionality was still ongoing at the EWG-6/2025 meeting in February 2025.

4 Following the completion of EWG-6/2025 activities and subsequent work at JC-39 of Cospas-Sarsat, the co-sponsors now consider the TWC service definition mature enough to be introduced as an optional functionality within EPIRBs.

Discussion:

5 The European Union's Global Navigation Satellite system, Galileo, provides state-of-the-art precision for Positioning and Navigation services, as well as a Search and Rescue (SAR) service, which has been fully integrated into the Cospas-Sarsat global network since 2016.

6 In 2020, Galileo/SAR introduced the Return Link (RLS) for Cospas-Sarsat beacons, which sends a signal back to the activated beacon, confirming detection and localization, typically within 1 minute, reassuring those in distress.

7 The European Commission is developing a portfolio of evolutions based on the RLS amongst which the Two-Way Communication (TWC) is the most promising. This functionality enables a bidirectional exchange of pre-defined questions, answers or instructions between the Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) and the distress beacon. The functionality is structured in three main components:

- **Initial Automatic Questions:** Triggered automatically upon beacon activation, these questions collect basic critical information about the situation and provide them to the RCC, enabling a tailored rescue response. To minimize the burden on the person in distress, only a limited number of automatic questions are asked.

- **Follow-On Questions:** Selected by the RCC via the Galileo/SAR/TWC web-based interface and transmitted to the beacon, Follow-On questions allow the RCC to refine its understanding of the situation by asking more specific questions, provided the person in distress can respond.

- **Instructions:** Designed to convey vital information from the RCC to the person in distress, the Instructions do not require a response.

8 Notably, all transmitted information is language-neutral, as messages are sent in the form of a reference that remains consistent regardless of the language programmed into the beacon or in the RCC interface (the Galileo/SAR/TWC interface). This approach eliminates the risk of language barriers, ensuring that critical information can be communicated effectively.

9 The TWC capable beacons will be equipped with a display and an input system left to the discretion of the manufacturers, enabling the selection of pre-programmed answers to the questions received.

10 At the Cospas-Sarsat Council 73, the main technical baseline describing the Two-Way Communication via Return Link was endorsed. Namely the new documents are the C/S R.025 “Cospas-Sarsat Two-Way Communication Operational Concept and High-Level Requirements” and the C/S T.018 “Specification for Second Generation Beacon”.

11 The TWC requirements described in those documents are therefore applicable to manufacturers planning to implement such functionality.

12 The co-sponsors did present a proposal suggesting to amend IMO Resolution MSC.471(101) regarding the performance standards for Float-free EPIRBs to include the Two-Way Communication and to add the definition of Two-Way Communication in SOLAS Chapter IV regulation 2.

Proposal

13 Annex 1 contains the proposed updates to IMO Resolution MSC.471(101) and to SOLAS Chapter IV regulation 2.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

14 The Sub-Committee is requested to:

.1 finalize the draft amendments to resolution MSC.471(101) and to SOLAS Chapter IV regulation 2;

.2 report to MSC 109 for approval; and

.3 take any other action it considers appropriate.

ANNEX 1

DRAFT AMENDMENT TO
THE PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR FLOAT-FREE EPIRBs,
RESOLUTION MSC. 471(101) Section 2.7
AND TO SOLAS CHAPTER IV REGULATION 2.

IMO Resolution MSC.471(101)

Introduction of new Section 2.7:

2.7 Optional Two-Way Communication (TWC):

If the EPIRB is implementing the functionality of Two-Way-Communication via the Return Link Service (RLS) (e.g. Galileo RLS) it should, with no prejudice on the EPIRB features specified herein:

.1 Be capable of receiving and processing the GNSS RLS signal; and
.2 Be designed to implement the TWC requirements as defined in Cospas-Sarsat documents C/S R.025 and C/S T.018, and in the TWC service provider document (e.g. Galileo SAR Service Definition Document).

SOLAS Chapter IV regulation 2

Introduction of the definition of the TWC service in the chapter 2 of the SOLAS Chapter IV Regulation 2 “Terms and definitions”.

Introducing:
“19) Two Way Communication via Return Link Service optional capability”