

# BOOSTING THE FCAS

Spain, France and Germany announce signing of contract for European future combat air system in Madrid

**O**N 28 April 2023, the defence ministers of Spain, France and Germany announced the signing of the contract for the Future Combat Air System (NGWS/FCAS) programme, a further leap forward for this emblematic European cooperation project, at an event held at the headquarters of the Spanish Air and Space Force in Madrid.

During the programme presentation event, the Spanish Minister of Defence, Margarita Robles, concurred with her counterparts from France, Sébastien Lecornu, and Germany, Boris Pistorius, that this is a strategic European project of enormous value, unity and commitment, not only in terms of military capabilities,

but also in the industrial, technological and socio-economic sphere.

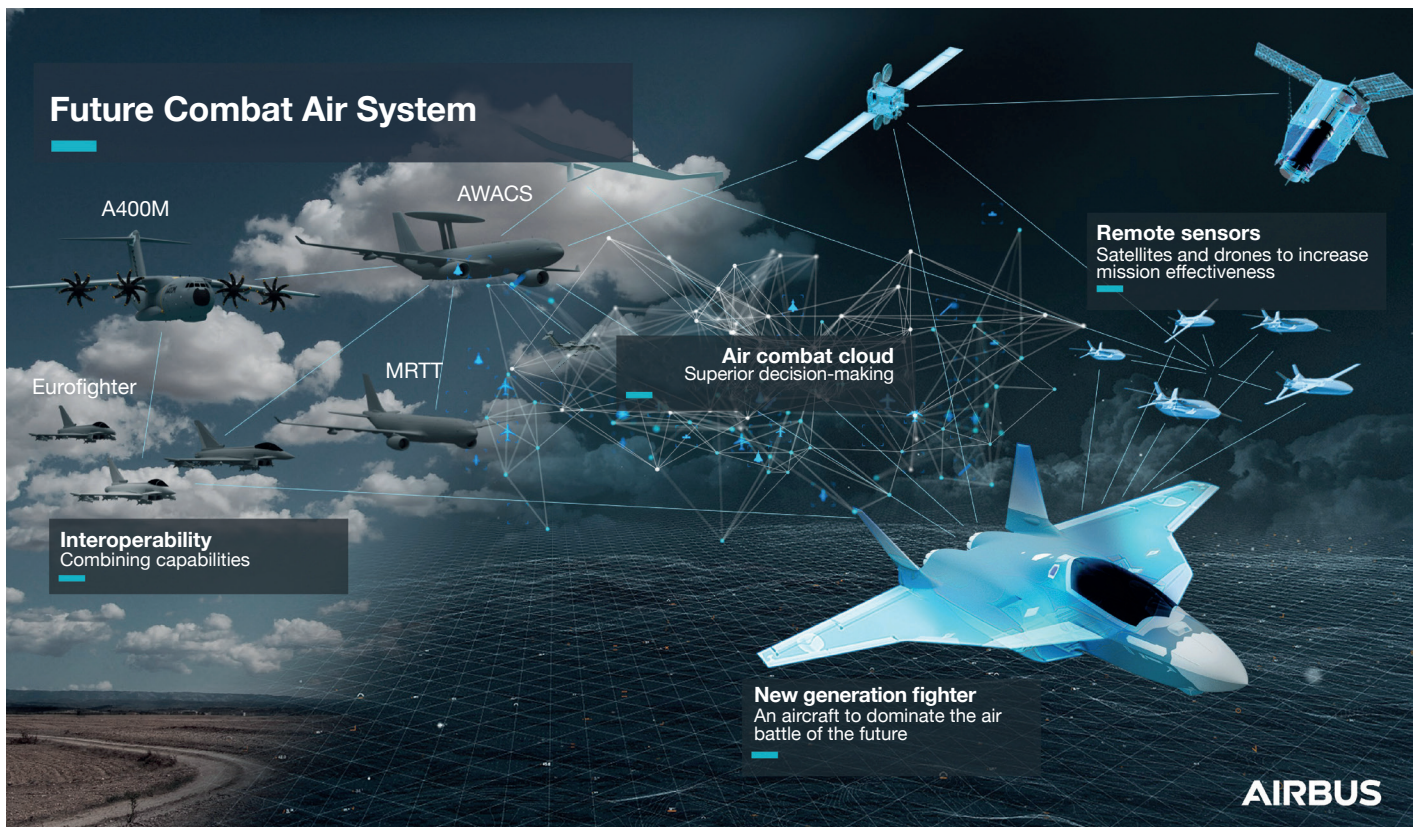
The event embodied the common commitment of the three countries and their industries to move forward together on the project, following the signing last December of the contract for the programme's Research, Technology and Demonstration activities.

"The public presentation of this project highlights the fact that all three countries believe strongly in the defence industry and, therefore, in the security of their citizens", said Robles. "It is an exciting and essential project for our Air and Space Forces and for our industries, which, working in coordination, will create jobs, talent, new industrial fabric and technology", the

minister added, thanking the teams from the three countries working on the project.

"The Spanish government has committed a budget of 2.5 billion euros, which underscores the importance we attach to the project. We will continue to push forward, slowly but surely", said Robles. "This Europe of Defence is essential and fundamental in a world full of risks. Everyone understands that we need to invest in defence to guarantee our rights", she stressed.

The German defence minister, meanwhile, emphasised the importance of collaboration between European partners and allies, pointing out that "we can do a lot on our own, but most things work better if we do them together. That is the maxim for





The Minister of Defence together with her German and French counterparts and senior officials at the Air and Space Force.

the coming years: More joint projects, more joint responsibility”, said Pistorius.

Likewise, the French minister described the signing between Germany, Spain and France as “an important step in preparing the air combat system of the future”. “This cooperation is first and foremost the expression of a common military need. Our three air forces will be able to rely on interoperability. I welcome Spain’s role in this common venture, and we know that we have a Spanish defence industry of the highest quality”, said Lecornu.

During the morning session, the French and German defence ministers were welcomed by Robles and the Air and Space Force Chief of Staff, Air General Javier Salto, at the Air and Space Force HQ. Following the trilateral meeting, the Secretary of State for Defence, María Amparo Valcarce, expressed her enthusiasm, stating that “the developments achieved through this project will not only position us at the technological forefront of the defence sector but will also intersect with other industries seeking dual solutions that enable our citizens to reap the benefits of these technological advances”.

Valcarce pointed out that the industrial strategy that has been designed is “deeply infused with values and commitments to sustainability”. She detailed that the FCAS programme will include a next-generation fighter as well as a new engine, a drone system, a combat cloud, sensors, low

observability technology and a simulation laboratory. It will be a “system of systems” where fighter aircraft, drones and the cloud will be connected to each other and to other systems, including ground vehicles and ships, in a digital environment facilitated by artificial intelligence, Big Data and Edge Computing technologies.

#### DEMOS

The contract launching the next phase of the NGWS/FCAS programme was awarded on 15 December 2022 to the programme’s three prime contractors: Dassault Aviation in France, Airbus Defence and Space GmbH in Germany, and Indra in Spain.

This is the contract for Phase 1B, valued at some 8 billion euros through 2028. Its purpose is to prepare and conduct demonstrations of the different systems, and it will enable the validation

of concepts and technologies for the start of their development. In an initial phase, this contract covers some 36 months of activities and exceeds 3 billion euros.

The first flight demonstrations are planned for the end of this decade and the system is expected to enter into service in 2040.

Each of the three countries contributes 33 per cent of the funding, and their industries receive an equivalent percentage of the work-share. Indra, the programme coordinator for Spain, will lead the Sensors pillar, with the French firm Thales and the German consortium FCMS as main partners, while Airbus Defence and Space Spain will internationally lead the ELOT (Enhanced Low Observability Technologies) pillar.

At the national level, Airbus DS Spain leads the participation in the future fighter aircraft; ITP Aero, the fighter engine; Indra, the combat cloud; and SATNUS (a consortium formed by the Spanish companies GMV, Sener and TecnoBit), the Remote Carriers pillar and the manned-unmanned teaming (MUT).

The FCAS contract will create more than 1,000 highly qualified jobs in Spain, some 400 at Indra, which will receive contracts worth around 600 million euros and will have a centre dedicated exclusively to this programme.

**Victor Hernández**

**More than 1,000 highly-skilled jobs will be created in Spain**