

Free English translation of a question to the Belgian Minister for the Interior Jan Jambon during plenary session in the Belgian Parliament.

## **ASTRID - Network upgrade**

Fellow Members,

I am happy to answer your question, as some media reports circulating yesterday could be described as confusing to say the least.

Let me be clear from the outset: **ASTRID will also continue as the mobile operator for emergency communications for the emergency and security services into the future.**

However, what will change - and I refer here to the period 2025-2030 - is the **technology platform** used for these communications. The radio network currently uses TETRA technology, which was developed in the 1990s and is still used by many emergency and security services throughout the world. However, it will eventually need to be replaced by new technology that uses greater bandwidth and offers more possibilities, such as image and video sharing, for example.

**ASTRID and this government are now looking towards the future.** For a number of years, national and international experts have been considering various different options regarding technology that could ultimately succeed TETRA. The most feasible solution to emerge is to adopt LTE (Long-Term Evolution), the same 4G and 5G technology that commercial networks (e.g. Proximus, Telenet and Orange) currently use and will continue to use into the future.

One of the options considered for replacing TETRA with LTE is the roll-out of a brand new network, involving the replacement of all existing base stations and antennae. **This option would not only take a lot of time to complete, but it would also be extremely costly.**

A much more attractive option involves **collaboration with existing telecoms operators** who already use LTE technology on their commercial network. Together with my colleague, Minister Alexander De Croo, we have taken the first steps towards collaboration. As part of the spectrum sharing regulation, negotiations have commenced with commercial operators and agreements have been reached in relation to:

- ✓ Obligations incumbent upon all 700 MHz operators to ensure the use of this frequency band **free of charge** by emergency and security services (including group communication, for example).
- ✓ Prerequisites such as additional coverage, security and priority, which may be requested by ASTRID and/or imposed by the Minister for Telecommunications and Minister for the Interior in return for fair compensation.

**In summary:**

ASTRID continues to be the operator for all urgent communications.

ASTRID will continue to provide coverage in areas not covered by private operators for commercial reasons.

ASTRID will continue to ensure continuity of communication services, including in the event of severe storms and power outages.

ASTRID will continue to manage access rights and ensure that communications are protected.

ASTRID will continue to grant priority access to emergency services when commercial networks are overloaded.

Does this mean that the additional funds committed by government to the ASTRID network have now been wasted?

No, in fact quite the opposite. This is because the existing network should remain operational for at least another 10 years.