

Audit of the Polycom Value Preservation 2030 and National Secure Data System key ICT projects and the Mobile Broadband Security Communication Systems project

Federal Office for Civil Protection

Key facts

For many years now, the Federal Office for Civil Protection (FOCP) has developed key components in the communication network and data exchange. With the three projects Polycom Value Preservation 2030 (WEP 2030), National Secure Data System (NSDS) and Mobile Broadband Security Communication Systems (MSCS), the FOCP is working to renew communication system technology, reduce the risk of system failure and incorporate the systems into digital broadband communication. In addition, the MSCS is intended to create the conditions for the networking of situation analysis. Two of these projects, WEP 2030 and MSCS, have been key federal ICT projects since 2015 and 2016 respectively.

The communications that the emergency services use on a daily basis cannot be provided in a crisis-resistant and encrypted manner. The Confederation and cantons want to close these security loopholes. The Confederation will be investing around CHF 310 million, although this figure may rise depending on the solution chosen. The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the three projects, one of them for the second time¹.

The audit revealed that the three FOCP projects have stalled. All three projects are experiencing delays and slow progress.

Polycom Value Preservation 2030 is at risk

Polycom is a tried and tested security communication network operating around the clock; by 2016, the Confederation and cantons had invested around CHF 1 billion in the system. By 2030, the Confederation will be spending approximately CHF 160 million to preserve the network. Backfitting the cantonal infrastructure will cost an additional CHF 150 million to CHF 200 million. The technological upgrade involves a parallel run between the old and new technologies in the WEP 2030 project. The migration is scheduled for completion by end-2024, but the project is beginning to falter.

Unresolved technical issues and huge supply delays have resulted in a narrowing of the migration window. A variety of measures and escalation attempts have been unable to speed the process up again. Room for manoeuvre has been largely exhausted and the success of the project is threatened. Risks such as the failure of suppliers and unavailability of key people, as well as difficulties with the technical implementation, are considerable. The SFAO recommends that the FOCP starts planning measures in preparation for dealing with these risks.

¹ Audit of the key ICT project WEP 2030 (audit mandate 16375), available on the SFAO website (www.sfao.admin.ch)

National Secure Data System project has been halted

The population's dependence on critical infrastructures such as the power supply and mobile telephony is high. Technical errors, cyberattacks or natural disasters have the potential to severely disrupt the increasingly interlinked telecommunication systems. The failure of crisis-resistant communication systems and the lack of reliable situation analyses could have a major impact on the ability to deal with catastrophes and emergencies.

The NSDS project is aimed at rectifying these shortcomings by means of a robust communication and data network, as well as a network of situation analysis systems. Under the CHF 150 million contract, the FOCP is also supposed to be connecting up the user locations. However, the project has faltered at the first project stage. A project overhaul has failed to bring about a recognised architecture or resolve the controversy over the operator role. The situation has been exacerbated by the still unclarified question regarding staff resources, which has effectively forced the project to a standstill.

The project has been halted; a further component for stable and secure communication in crisis situations is thus a remote prospect, despite the Confederation having been given a clear legal mandate. The FOCP must clarify the integration of NSDS into the federal network strategy and the federal market model as quickly as possible.

Doubts over the lead in mobile broadband communication

The partners in the Swiss security network can only guess at the future path to mobile broadband. For 2023, the Federal Council expects a report on the subject setting out the options for further action to define the contours in more detail and show the direction of travel. The fundamental need for MSCS is undisputed, as narrow band communication technology is likely to become obsolete by 2035.

The coordination role assigned by the Federal Council decision of 29 January 2020 is interpreted very narrowly by the FOCP and it has transferred responsibility for content management to the cantons, although according to the applicable legal provisions, it will be responsible for the functioning of the entire system, should it be implemented. Against this backdrop, the SFAO recommends that the FOCP swiftly defines its role in the MSCS pilot, in order to assume its responsibility for the entire system and align it more closely with the Armed Forces telecommunications project.

No strategic control for telecommunication systems

The FOCP's telecommunication systems were set up independently of each other and are only loosely networked. There is no clearly understandable overview of all the FOCP's systems, despite the fact that modern systems are increasingly interconnected and it is hardly possible to operate them independently any more. This is because neither the strategy nor the architectures and portfolio management are proving effective.

In order to meet the future challenges, the FOCP must draw up core principles. These include a development path showing the FOCP's proposed direction of travel for its system landscape over the long term. In addition, the existing tools for the strategic control of telecommunication systems should be combined into an overall concept and the content should be strengthened.

Support for the department in crisis situations is essential

At the end of 2019, the Department decided to part ways with the Director of the FOCP. A new interim Director was installed for nine months, after which he was replaced by the new Director with effect from 1 January 2021. In a crisis situation, this repeated change of Director within a short space of time requires careful and close monitoring by the Department. The SFAO notes that the Department is now aware of the seriousness of the situation.

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