

Airbus irked by Spain's choice of fighter jet partner

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The combat fighter is to go into service in 2040

Airbus has sharply criticised Madrid for choosing defence systems specialist Indra to coordinate Spain's participation in a Franco-German project to develop a new-generation fighter jet, in which the aviation

giant is deeply involved.

The decision, which was taken by the [defence ministry](#) in late August, saw Indra chosen to coordinate Spain's work on a stealth fighter whose development is being led by Airbus and France's Dassault Aviation.

Airbus chief executive Guillaume Faury told online business journal El Confidencial the group "didn't see the decision coming" as it was expected to be selected. He said that Indra was a sensors and equipment producer but had no capabilities in airplanes, drones nor satellites.

"You don't want someone who makes wheels or computers designing your car. You want a carmaker," he told El Confidencial on a visit to Spain to convince the government to rethink its decision.

Indra is a Spanish technology and defence group which had sales of 3 billion euros (\$3.3 billion) in 2018. Airbus group sales in the same year totalled 63,7 billion.

The ambitious Future Combat Air System (FCAS) project will combine a new generation fighter plane with drones, satellites and other aircraft to help reduce the EU's long reliance on US planes and equipment.

It aims to have the new plane operational by 2040, when it will replace the current generation of Rafale and Eurofighter jets.

Speaking to El Confidencial at the start of his visit, Faury said it was "difficult to imagine" anyone coming in for the design phase who didn't have the same expertise as Airbus "in planes, drones or satellites, but only in systems and sensors".

But in a separate interview with El Confidencial on the same day, Defence Minister Angel Olivares showed no willingness to reverse the

decision.

"This is not a circumstantial decision, which can be changed overnight. We have decided on Indra, and we will continue to insist that they work together with Airbus and the rest of the industry."

He also expressed the government's frustration at its weakening influence within the Airbus Group, in which it holds a four percent stake, compared with the 12 percent held by France and by Germany.

"The relative importance of Spain within Airbus is shrinking," he said.

"In the latest restructuring, Airbus Spain's management no longer has an active role on the executive committee of the Group, for the first time."

Since 2015, Spain's representative on the board of directors has been chosen by Airbus itself, against the wishes of the Spanish government.

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