



Halle (Saale)/Berlin/Erding, 25 August 2025

Cyber-secure, scalable, combat-ready: SPECTRA Challenge seeks fresh ideas for electronic drone defence

Innovations sought for electronic warfare technologies

With the SPECTRA Challenge, the Cyberagentur, the Cyber Innovation Hub of the German Armed Forces and the System Soldier innovation laboratory are launching a new innovation format to find ideas for defending unmanned systems against electronic threats. Creative approaches are sought – from concept ideas to practical prototypes. The starting signal will be given on 25 August 2025 at 12 noon.

Electronic warfare has long been a central threat to unmanned systems. To meet these challenges, the Agentur für Innovation in der Cybersicherheit GmbH (Cyberagentur), the Cyber Innovation Hub of the German Armed Forces (CIHBw) and the System Soldier Innovation Laboratory (InnoLabSysSdt) have joined forces in a joint innovation project: The SPECTRA Challenge calls on developers from research, start-ups, industry and public authorities to develop new ways of detecting electronic attacks such as jamming, spoofing or signal takeover at an early stage and defending against them effectively. The best solutions will receive up to 100,000 euros in development fees.

A joint approach to a complex problem

The joint innovation challenges are creating a new format for cross-institutional cooperation. @Cyberagentur contributes strategic vision and research funding, the CIHBw provides the operational perspective through practical trials and contributes start-up expertise, while InnoLabSysSdt is responsible for further practical testing and military validation using scientific methods. The focus is on bringing together skills and expertise to develop new solutions for the deployment of unmanned systems and countermeasures.

With the SPECTRA Challenge, we are linking civilian creativity, military requirements and technological development in a new way. This could not only result in a technological leap forward in the protection of unmanned systems, but also serve as a guide for many follow-up projects," explains Prof. Dr. Christian Hummert, Scientific Director at Cyberagentur.

Ideas with potential – from sketch to application

Whether basic research, a working demonstrator or a system idea – SPECTRA welcomes all contributions that think outside the box. The aim is not only to promote innovation, but also to strategically initiate its path to further development and use. The challenge specifically activates potential that would not be visible elsewhere.

"This challenge enables us to productively combine current needs from the armed forces with the implementation strength of young groups, companies and research institutions," says Sven Weizenegger, Head of the Cyber Innovation Hub at the German Armed Forces.

Straight into testing – fast transfer

A central component of the challenge is the joint Practice Week at the System Soldier innovation laboratory in Erding. This is where technical concepts meet military reality. In simulated operational situations, solutions can be tested, adapted and optimised for later use.

InnoLabSysSdt is not just about developing technologies, but also about testing their suitability under real conditions – and thus building bridges to the troops.

Two paths – an aim: making an impact

The challenge is divided into two parallel formats. The practical track is aimed at groups that can develop and demonstrate mission-ready prototypes within a few months. The moonshot track offers space for visionary early-stage ideas that pursue new approaches and question existing paradigms.

Both tracks are supported by coaching services and direct feedback from end users.

The challenge starts on 25 August 2025 at 12:00 noon with an open application phase. On 7 and 8 October, selected groups will present their ideas to an expert jury at the Pitch Days in Erding. The ten best groups per track will then work on developing their solutions in an intensive development phase until the end of November.

During Practice Week from 1 to 5 December 2025, the results will be tested, demonstrated and evaluated under realistic conditions.

SPECTRA is more than just a competition. It is an open invitation to anyone who wants to help shape technological security solutions – quickly, realistically and in a practical way. The challenge creates space for solutions that come out of the garage – and makes them compatible for use by the armed forces, research or future procurement.

Further information:

<https://challenge.Cyberagentur.de>

<https://www.Cyberagentur.de>

<https://www.cyberinnovationhub.de/>

<https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/ausrustung-baainbw/organisation/wiweb>

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