Optronics, Sagem's field of excellence

By harnessing technological expertise in a variety of complementary domains, Sagem (Safran) is able to offer its customers a broad range of high-end optronic solutions. Jean-Christophe Mugler, sales and marketing manager at Sagem Optronics & Defense Department, tells us more about it.

How do you account for Sagem's leadership on the optronics market?
Let's start with optronics itself: the synthesis of optics and everything to do with detection, image processing and stabilization. Today Sagem has a thorough grasp of optical sensors spanning all of the different spectral bands, from the visible to infrared. Sagem has also developed image processing and stabilization know-how. With this dual expertise, we can design optronic applications for use in cutting-edge industries such as space, aviation, defense and security. Being part of the Safran group is also a major advantage. At the Milipol 2013 trade show, where our range of portable optronic devices was on display, we were able to showcase the synergies between Sagem and Morpho (Safran). In sales, because we have common customers in police and special forces. But also in technology such as image processing, for which we have complementary fields of expertise. Morpho's facial recognition skills work very well in combination with the ones we have developed in spectral band fusion*.

What is your strategy in this market?
There are a lot of players, but very few cater to the high end of the market. Our strategy is to offer high value-added products, but in production volumes that allow us to keep costs attractive. We have also managed to leverage the combination of optronic and inertial-sensor stabilization - another of Sagem's areas of expertise - which gives us a valuable competitive edge. Lastly, our optronic solutions are part of broader service line-ups: upgraded infantry systems, drones or air surveillance, for example. And while our customers naturally demand top-performing products, they also expect long-term support and guidance. For this local support, we rely on partnerships with local manufacturers capable of providing maintenance and service solutions where our customers need them.

What is your customers' profile?
We have about 500 customers on the optronic market, including the US army and the German and UK defense ministries. This means that, every year, we sell several thousand thermal imagers for armored vehicles, along with gyrostabilized optronic pods for helicopters, infrared binoculars for special force soldiers, and ship-borne observation equipment such as submarine periscopes. And don't forget that 75% of our business is for the export market!

* Operation that consists in merging several images from different spectral bands.