

Detection of GNSS interference through natural hazard monitoring systems and next steps towards the development of an interference early warning system

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ABSTRACT

The ability of GNSS to offer Positioning, Navigation and Timing (PNT) functions to existing and emerging applications and technologies is expected to drive significant advancement in multiple fields. Strategic Earth Observation infrastructure units, such as permanent GNSS station networks are increasingly integrated into civil protection strategies and operation plans, serving as decisive tools for monitoring the evolution of geohazards, and assessing their potential impact on the anthropogenic and physical environment. Nevertheless, GNSS performance is still vulnerable to unintentional or intentional interference, with the latter on the rise. Consequently, Interference Monitoring Networks have been developed worldwide to detect interference and pinpoint its sources by means of localization techniques, thereby enabling early warning and immediate resolution of interference problems.

The severe effects of interference on the GNSS signal integrity have prompted significant research endeavours towards the development of efficient methodologies for the timely detection of interference sources. Specifically, in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean region, existing infrastructure for monitoring natural hazards is readily available and in use for a significant number of positioning or geophysical applications. In Cyprus, the largest GNSS strategic infrastructure unit, CyCLOPS, has been operational since 2021, featuring state-of-the-art Tier-1/2 GNSS permanent stations, and calibration-grade SAR corner reflectors installed throughout the country to monitor accurately active and ongoing geohazard incidents. Through this infrastructure, intentional interference events were recorded and analysed for the first time. This study reviews the ability of CyCLOPS to be utilized as an Interference Early Detection System by applying detection and analysis techniques. These techniques will be chosen appropriately taking into consideration existing equipment apparatus, topology and characteristics of the existing geohazard and similar monitoring stations. By incorporating additional equipment, the objective is to develop the first Cyprus GNSS Interference Early Warning System based on CyCLOPS, which will enable continuous monitoring of the GNSS signals for interference detection and localization.

Keywords: GNSS, Interference, Localisation, Geohazards, Monitoring Networks, RINEX

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1. INTRODUCTION

The GNSS ability to offer positioning, navigation and timing functions to newly found applications and technologies is expected to drive evolution in the coming years in multiple fields. These include solutions for consumers, finance, transport, telecommunications, manned and unmanned aviation, maritime, emergency response, agriculture, geomatics and critical infrastructure ^{1, 2}. As a result, the number of installed receivers are expected to reach 9.5 billion by 2029, whilst the revenues from both devices and services are expected to reach €325 billion (European GNSS Supervisory Authority, 2019). The weak satellite navigation signals ¹ are becoming more and more vulnerable to unintentional or intentional interference. Due to their low power levels, GNSS signals are susceptible to radio frequency interference from intentional or unintentional sources. A typical GPS signal is received 20 dB below the receiver noise floor range. A positive signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) is only achievable with signal processing in the range of frequencies. The GNSS receiver front end captures only a small proportion of this range ⁴. GNSS signals can suffer from a wide range of interference factors, such as interference amongst satellites, interference amongst systems, space weather and atmospheric phenomena.

The expansion and criticality of the GNSS services have a substantial impact on the security and safety of personnel and a huge financial implication. Several cases of system failures and cases of unintentional and intentional interference have become the subject of extensive studies. A study from London Economics – an independent European economic consultancy, has estimated that a five-day loss of GNSS will cost more than £5.2 billion to the U.K. economy ⁵. Another study conducted in the U.S. in 2011 has shown that more than 3.3 million U.S. jobs in agriculture and other industries relied heavily on GPS technology. Possible disruption of GPS would pose direct economic costs of up to \$96 billion to U.S. commercial GPS users and manufacturers ⁶.

Interference incidents can be split into those caused unintentionally and those caused intentionally. Unintentional interference is mainly caused by other technologies that make use of spectrum at nearby frequencies to the selected GNSS frequencies. Harmonic emissions from high-power transmitters, mobile satellite services, television, ultra-wideband radar and personal electronic devices interfere with the GNSS frequencies. According to ⁷, even the harmonics by DVB-T, UHF IV and UHF V could coincide with the L1/E1 band causing disruption of the GNSS signals. This is confirmed through a campaign that ran in Norway that lasted almost two years. The results show that a total of 7.488 incidents have been reported where a large portion of them was due to faulty equipment ⁸. International Frequency Coordination bodies and Local Regulatory Authorities need to protect the spectrum from existing and emerging technologies to avoid any controversies and interference imminent threads, such as in the case of LightSquared LTE deployment in the U.S. ⁹. The latter need to have all necessary means in place to identify, locate and take all necessary actions to seize interfering sources. Interference incidents can be split into those caused unintentionally and those caused intentionally.

As GNSS becomes more widely used for revenue generation and human/assets protection, the rewards from criminal activity aimed at disrupting the system grow ¹⁰ leading to Intentional Interference. Intentional interference is distinguished in the three following categories:

- **Jamming:** This is the act of transmitting a high-power signal that can cause saturation or blockage of the GNSS signal leading to loss of tracking and acquisition capabilities. According to ¹¹, jammers can be distinguished based on the type of signal transmitted:
 - Single Tone Amplitude Modulation (AM)
 - Single Tone Frequency Modulation (F.M.)
 - Continuous Wave (C.W.) Narrowband
 - Chirp Signals- Swept Continuous Wave (SCW)
- **Spoofing:** is a more sophisticated interference technique where falsified information is provided through GNSS look-alike signals manipulating the tracking receiver to provide false location or clock data. Spoofing GNSS signals creates a controllable misreporting of position, for example, to deceive tracking devices ¹².

- Meaconing: is defined as the reception, delay and rebroadcast of an entire block of the radio-frequency spectrum containing an ensemble of GNSS signals.¹³ Meaconing can lead to falsified information to users concerning the location of interest.

Intentional Interference cases involve taxi services¹⁴, truck drivers¹⁵, maritime services¹⁶ and civil aviation¹⁷. The growth of interference is such that, interference occurrence in 2017 has increased by 47 times compared to 2014¹⁸. Other cases of interference involved impact on manned and unmanned aircraft¹⁷ and fisheries.

2. USE OF GNSS CONTINUOUSLY OPERATING REFERENCE STATIONS FOR INTERFERENCE DETECTION

Many countries and International Collaborations have established throughout the years suitable infrastructure, on a National and Regional Level, for monitoring ground motion. Strategic infrastructure units are continuously incorporated in civil protection strategies and operation plans and constitute indispensable means for not only monitoring the hazards themselves but for serving as critical damage assessment tools.

At the same time, National Authorities and bodies in order to cope with the rise of interference incidents, have built networks of reference stations or further developed existing geodesic infrastructure with the aim of early detection and localisation of interference. Geodetic reference systems are the fundamental infrastructure that provides the basis for precision positioning and navigation using GNSS.

In Denmark GNSS experts from DTU in coordination with Aarhus local authorities and the Danish Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency SDFE have established the TAPAS monitoring system²⁰. A system that comprises eleven GNSS reference stations that have been installed within the city of Aarhus and consists of high-quality Septentrio PolarX5S reference stations with Leica AR20 antennas. Through the implementation of a Sum-of-Squares (SoS) detector the Carrier-to-Noise (C/No) data archived through the receiver RINEX data is collected and processed.

Generalized Interference Detection and Localization System (GIDL)²¹ is a system that was designed and implemented by Stanford university in collaboration with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The system consists of four antennas 100m apart slaved to a common clock to allow three-dimensional interference location. This system was originally designed to complement the aircraft precision approach and landing systems, namely the Local Area Augmentation System (LAAS) as well as the Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS).

Interference Monitoring System (IMS) system²² is a Pan-European system that was designed and implemented by Astrium GmbH and Iguassu Software Systems in order to provide Galileo GSS and EGNOS RIMS operators an early warning in case of interference presence at close proximity to the critical infrastructure of interest. A system of utmost importance given the significant role that the EGNOS RIMS and Galileo GSS stations play in the improvement of Galileo accuracy.

In a similar way, the Swedish Continuously Operating Reference Stations Network (CORS) named SWEPOS consisting of around 450 stations spanning across the Swedish territory was utilized for Interference Detection purposes. In accordance with²³, an experimental setup was set at three operative SWEPOS stations where data extracted from the RINEX files were compared against the results obtained from RF Oculus, a professional Interference Detection System that continuously monitors the RMS and average received power in order to calculate the Impulsiveness Ratio (IR). The IR results are further complemented with spectral plots in an effort to detect and characterize interference. Data extraction from a SWEPOS station is shown in Figure 1.

To reduce costs a variety of solutions have been examined. In²⁴ an enhancement of automotive receivers is suggested, in^{25,25-33} low-cost commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) receivers are utilized, whereas in³⁴⁻³⁷, Software Defined Radios (SDR) that offer more flexibility in implementing detection algorithms are utilized. A few scientists have applied non-ground detection methods such as UAVs³⁸, observations through LEO satellites³⁹ and even helicopters⁴⁰.

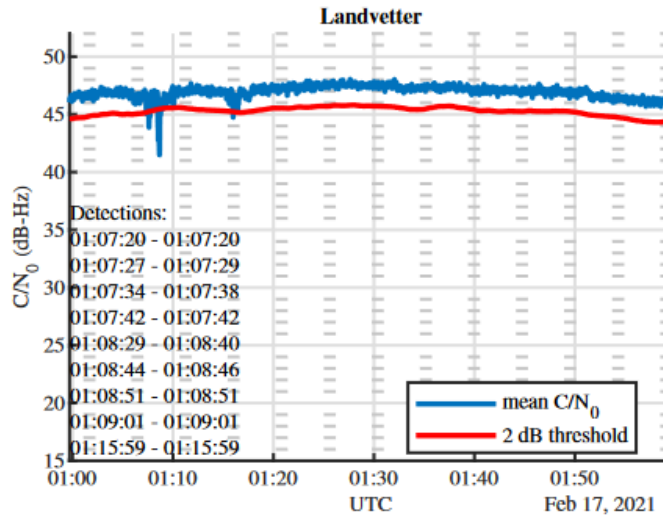


Figure 1: Fors et al- Mean carrier-to-noise-density ratio at Landvetter SWEPOS station

In Italy, Thales Alenia designed and implemented PV-SIS⁴¹, a GNSS Signal-in-Space Verification platform under the project SENECA launched by the Italian authorities of Space and Air Navigation and has been tested in four Italian airports.

Further to the above, an international collaboration developed and tested an Advanced RFI Detection Analysis and Alerting System abbreviated as ARFIDAAS⁴²⁻⁴⁴ with simultaneous deployment and recording of data in Norway, Finland and the Netherlands with a total of six stations. The system front ends continuously measure power levels, automatic Gain Control variations and monitor the RF spectrum. Via the use of specialized software, the measurements and other important parameters of the system are collected and processed. Finally, all data captured from the remote stations are transferred to a centralized unit. A capture of an interference incident by ARFIDAAS is shown in Figure 2.

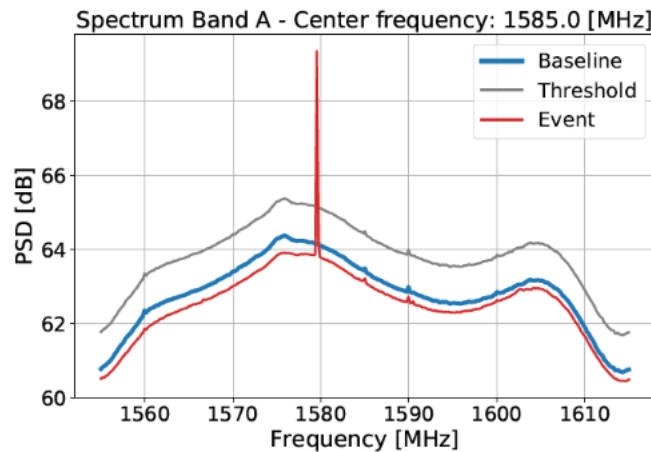


Figure 2: Morrison et al- Capture of Interference through ARFIDAAS stations

In the UK, a collaboration amongst governmental departments, the industry and academia has also performed a series of activities in an effort to early detect and localize interference incidents, especially in areas in the vicinity of critical infrastructure. Systems such as GAARDIAN and its predecessor SENTINEL⁴⁵ have been developed and operated successfully.

In⁴⁶ an Australian GNSS Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS) which consists of a number of sensor stations connected to a central processing unit, to achieve real-time interference is examined.

A system evolved through a regional CORS network is the NeVoCGPS system. The system consists of 30 GPS stations

that constitute a geodetic surveillance system for volcanic activity in Naples ⁴⁷.

The European Union was also alerted of the dramatic increase in interference incidents and funded several attempts on the related subject. Such a project cofounded by EUSPA, under the project name STRIKE3 ⁴⁸ involved monitoring of interference in 23 countries. The results showed an extraordinary number of 450.000 cases where interference that affected L1 was detected.

3. THE PRESENCE OF INTERFERENCE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Cyprus is considered the southeasternmost border of the European Union at the crossroads of three continents and constitutes an important geopolitical location. This area has been greatly affected lately by political unrest and conflicts leading to a drastic increase in interference cases. This is confirmed through Cyprus Air Navigation Reports, Euro control and independent studies. Specifically, Euro control reported in March 2021⁴⁹ that the “Cypriot airspace was one of the most regularly affected by RFI in the network, with 395 cases reported between March 2018 and September 2020 that caused significant GNSS outages over international waters where alternative navigation system coverage is limited.” Further to that, DLR and the Zurich University of Applied Sciences ⁵⁰ organized in 2020 in collaboration with the Cyprus authorities a test flight within the Nicosia FIR in order to comprehend the impact of interference on the avionic hardware. An Airbus 320 equipped with a high-definition radio-frequency recording device and an experimental Multi-Mode Receiver performed a test flight. The trajectory of the test flight is shown in Figure 3. According to the study, the Multi-Mode receiver was not able to provide a position solution for 80% of the experimental time.

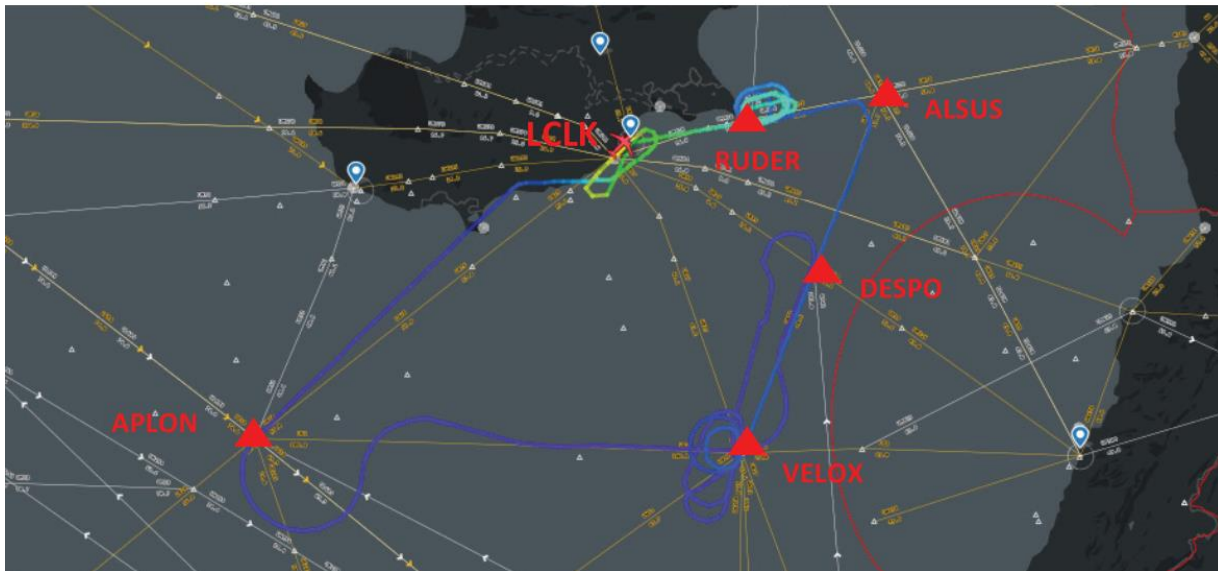


Figure 3 – Trajectory of experimental flight by DLR

4. CYPRUS GNSS NETWORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Cyprus is located within an area where the African tectonic plate as it moves to the north collides with the Eurasian plate. This ranks Cyprus at the highest place with regard to seismic risks. It is worth mentioning that according to ⁵¹ a total of 285 earthquakes with a magnitude of four (4) on the Richter scale or above, have struck within 300 km of Cyprus in the past 10 years. Further to that, the island exhibits many active landslides and slope instabilities. These conditions constitute a permanent threat to the civilians, critical infrastructure as well as the rich cultural heritage of the island. At the same time, the region is ideal for scientific exploration and experimentation. In 2021, a collaboration between the Cyprus

University of Technology and the German Aerospace Agency (DLR) led to the development of the Cyprus Continuously Operating Natural Hazards Monitoring and Prevention Systems abbreviated as CyCLOPS⁵². CyCLOPS consists of a network of stations and an Operations Center. Each station is equipped with GNSS cutting-edge Tier 1/2 reference stations, weather stations and tilt meters. The geographical distribution of the reference stations is shown in Figure 4. According to⁵³, the CyCLOPS CORS are meeting a number of criteria defined by national bodies such as UNAVCO, IGS and EPN. The CORS are equipped with Trimble R9 receivers and Zephyr Geodetic 2 & 3 antennas. A picture of a CyCLOPS station is shown in Figure 5.

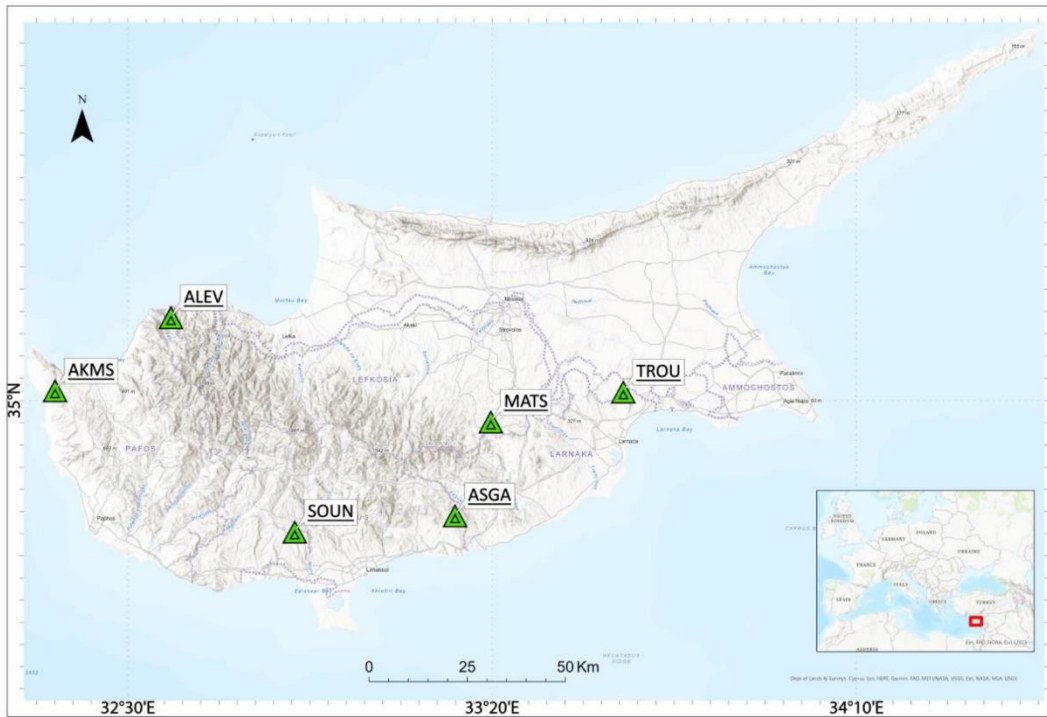


Figure 4 – CORS deployment over the Cyprus Territory



Figure 5 -CyCLOPS Reference Station

5. DETECTION OF INTERFERENCE THROUGH CYCLOPS

The way forward for capturing and analyzing interference through CyCLOPS CORS is via the processing of the RINEX data that are currently collected from all stations and stored on a daily basis for the last few years. The Receiver Independent Exchange (RINEX) is the International Standard developed for the distribution and storing of GNSS Data. The development of the format goes back to 1989 when scientists from the Astronomical Institute of the University of Bern developed a format to allow easy exchange of GPS data collected as part of the EUREF89 campaign⁵⁴. Through the years the RINEX format has been further improved to allow processing of data from multiple GNSS receiver vendors. Currently, there are four different RINEX versions that have been developed through the years as necessary updates in order to account for the technological changes and improvements in the GNSS networks.

In environments with Radio Frequency Interference (RFI), GNSS receivers that rely on precise positioning and timing capabilities often suffer significant performance degradation. All GNSS receivers have a method for indicating the signal strength of the satellites they are tracking. This signal strength can be displayed in various formats, such as vertical bars, normalized signal strength, Carrier-over-Noise density (C/No), or Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR). Among these, C/No, which represents the ratio of the carrier power to the noise power, is commonly used for assessing the signal quality of tracked satellites and is easily obtainable from a GNSS receiver as it is included in the RINEX file⁵⁵.

Typically, GPS signals are received at about 20 dB below the noise floor, resulting in an SNR of -20 dB and leading to a nominal C/No of 43 dBHz for a GPS satellite. The typical C/No values in an L1 C/A code receiver, for example, range from 37 to 45 dBHz as the estimated C/No values can vary between receivers due to differences in the estimation algorithms used^{55,56}.

In our case, the availability of archived data that has been collected and stored in RINEX format from a CORS network consisting of State-of-the-Art receivers, provides an excellent basis for experimentation and development of an Interference Early Detection System, based on a model that will be developed, that takes into account the C/No observations. It is expected that if a number of extrinsic factors that affect the signal strength are taken into account, then any further reduction in C/No readings could be due to an active interfering signal. The most important factors impacting the stability of the C/No readings, and consequently, the SNR estimations are:

- Ionospheric Scintillation – the received satellite signals are impacted by electron density irregularities within the ionosphere⁵⁷. The presence of strong Scintillation is expected to have a similar effect on all the receivers of the CORS Network in contradiction to the presence of Interference that normally should impact a limited number of receivers.
- Satellite Elevation Angle– Given that GNSS systems base their operation on Medium Earth Orbit satellites (MEO) it is foreseen that a number of parameters such as distance from receiver to satellite, varying elevation angle, and GNSS receiver antenna pattern contribute to the fluctuation of the SNR estimation⁵⁸. Given that the satellite elevation factor is the dominant factor that affects the SNR, a simplistic method to avoid the impact of low elevation angles is to discard any C/No readings due to low elevation angles by carefully setting the exclusion limits.
- GNSS receiver setup unique characteristics - Especially in the case of low-cost GNSS receivers and antennas there is a variation in performance from station to station. In our case, the use of high-end GNSS receivers, antennas, and quality materials for installing the CyCLOPS stations, ensures uniform performance across the network.

A collection of C/No values per station will be processed in order to account for the presence of natural phenomena that have an impact on the signal strength. By creating a benchmark of the expected results any further reduction in C/No values by more than 5dBHz with a hysteresis of 10 seconds will trigger a process for further investigation and analysis of results including the presence of Spectral Plots (see Figure 6).

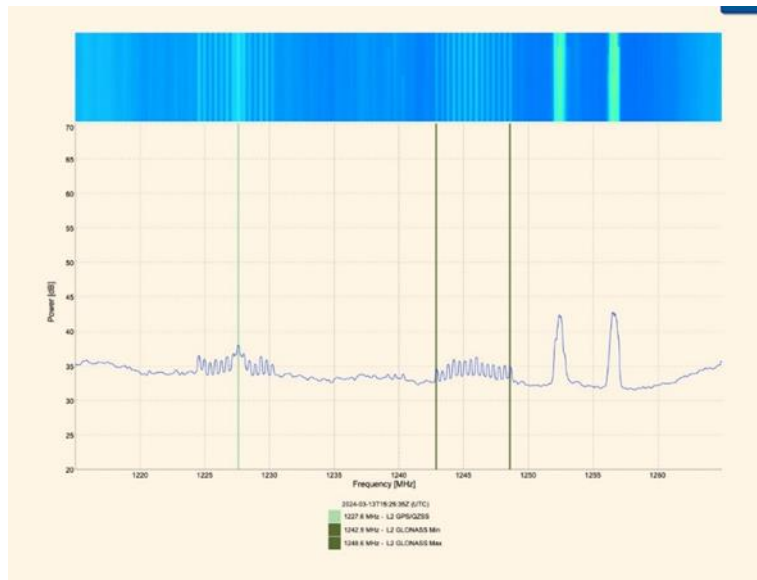


Figure 6 – Spectral plot from Troulloi station - Visible Interference on both L1 & L2

In addition, the mean daily signal strength for all available GNSS constellations across the GNSS bands is generated for each GNSS station during continuous daily tracking. A representative example from station TROU00CYP is illustrated in Figure 7, where the signal strength, estimated in terms of C/No, covers a two-year period from May 2022 to May 2024.

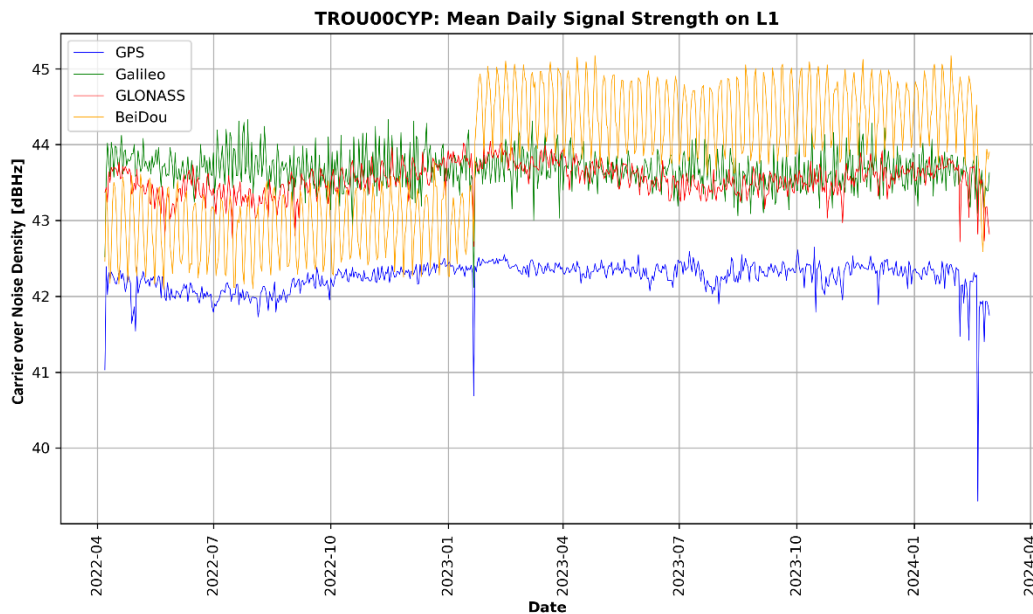


Figure 7. A representative example of the signal strength quality control in the TROU00CYP station.

The above plot demonstrates that GPS, Galileo and GLONASS display consistency in signal strength on the L1 band. However, sporadic spikes observed in GPS suggest that the decrease in the C/No could be related to occurrences triggered by various factors such as interference, ionospheric disturbances, or

signal obstruction. The data spread demonstrates that the signal strengths vary within an acceptable range. The median value is 43.59 dBHz (including all bands and constellations), well above the threshold of 37 dBHz, implying that the signal strength is reliably strong.

6. FUTURE WORK-CONCLUSIONS

The advent of GNSS technologies is rapidly expanding across a large number of sectors with a critical impact on economic, social, health and safety pillars of human life. The convergence of telecommunications to wireless networks, the frequency reuse in order to serve the continuous demand for additional bandwidth and the malicious cause of Intentional Interference are causing serious degradations/ interruptions of GNSS signals.

The scientific community has been very active through the last decade in an effort to develop Interference detection, localisation and mitigation techniques. Various methods have been developed taking into account inherent GNSS receiver parameters such as AGC and C/No variation by developing a series of algorithms and statistical techniques in order to successfully confront the various interference types.

Through the years the GNSS technologies became an integral part of critical infrastructure. It became evident that it is crucial for the system operators and National authorities to be immediately alerted in cases where the quality and integrity of GNSS signals have been compromised. Under these developments, many Nations as well as Regional Collaborations already had in place CORS networks to further upgrade these in order to constitute early warning systems in case of interference presence.

Cyprus's unique geographical topology has become a point of interest for further study. The implementation of a National CORS Network with state-of-the-art equipment facilitates the requirements for accurate measurements that aid further scientific exploration and experimentation. At the same time, the island is located in a region that is heavily affected by geopolitical developments that lead to clashes and unrest. Due to this fact, it has been verified that the quality of the GNSS signals is frequently degraded due to man-made interference. To this end, it is of utmost importance to implement a National strategy for the development of an Interference Early Warning System. Our effort is focused on the full exploitation of the CyCLOPS infrastructure in order to enhance its capabilities for the detection of Interference through manipulation of the RINEX database.

Through processing the SNR readings captured from each station, a benchmark with SNR expected levels under interference-free conditions will be created for each station. Further to that, through International Collaborations results from preselected stations could be verified by running in parallel with existing Interference Detection systems.

Finally, the stations can be further enhanced with the installation of additional GNSS receivers such as Software Defined Radios that allow flexibility in the implementation of Statistical analysis and precorrelation techniques which could broaden the ability of the system to detect various types of interference.

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