



France: MGCS Delayed, Transition Tank Increasingly Urgent

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According to **Zone Militaire (Opex360)**, citing a report, **the French Army (Armée de Terre)** is close to a decision on a “transition tank”: a bridging solution necessary because, even after the upgrade to the **Leclerc XLR** standard, the current tank may not cover the entire period separating Paris from the arrival of the **MGCS (Main Ground Combat System)**, the next-generation land system developed with Germany.

The Issue: Keeping the Leclerc in Service Until MGCS

The issue is not only “technical” but also **one of timing and actual fleet availability**. On one hand, France has initiated the modernization of the **Leclerc XLR** as part of the SCORPION transformation; on the other, the horizon for MGCS keeps shifting, while platform wear and obsolescence erode operational readiness.

A recent document from the **French Senate** frames the problem explicitly: **the Leclerc could be replaced by the MGCS “by 2045”** and, “in the meantime,” it is necessary to **avoid capability gaps** by maintaining the vehicle's availability and operability. The same text highlights obsolescences particularly affecting **engine components (turbomachinery)** and **optronic sensors**, addressed through fleet renewal and “perpetuation” interventions.

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What the Leclerc XLR Brings (and What It Doesn't Solve)

The **XLR** upgrade is designed to integrate the tank into collaborative combat (SCORPION), with more modern connectivity and data management. In summary, the update introduces elements such as the **SICS information system** and the **CONTACT radio**, a **remote-controlled turret**, and improvements in protection and survivability (including, according to reconstructions, the inclusion of the **BARAGE jammer** against threats like IEDs/rockets). However, the adoption of an **Active Protection System (APS)** is not “default” in the package, and especially **the engine remains a sensitive point**.

Numerically, the trajectory indicated in various sources is clear: the goal is to reach **200 modernized Leclercs**, with an intermediate milestone of **160 by 2030** and the remaining **40 by 2035**.

An analysis relayed by [**IFRI**](#) (which summarizes a report dedicated to the future of the armored component) highlights that, although some official numbers are no longer published, the estimated availability of the Leclerc would remain **very low**, with assessments in the order of **25-35% in 2025**. In the same context, the XLR modernization is described as **insufficient** to remove some of the most critical obsolescences, including the **engine**; re-engining would be possible but costly: **about 1.5 billion euros** according to a cited estimate.

It is in this context that the hypothesis of a **transition tank** becomes central: not just a simple upgrade, but a choice to **cover the 2030-2045 window** (or the long wait) without losing critical mass and operational credibility in heavy maneuvering.

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MGCS: Project Progressing, But Still a Long Horizon

On the MGCS front, recent months have seen signs of industrial and political progress. The partners **KNDS, Rheinmetall, and Thales** have formalized the corporate structure dedicated to the program: a **project company with 25% shares each**, headquartered in **Cologne**, and a national work distribution of **50/50** between France and Germany.

Official communications frame MGCS as a **multi-platform system** intended to replace Leclerc and Leopard 2, with a temporal goal often indicated as **“by 2040”**.

However, French parliamentary documents related to the budget cycle also describe a detailed study roadmap: conclusion of the architecture, restructuring into **eight “pillars”**, initiation of studies (phase 1A), and a target of **first deliveries around 2040**, while acknowledging delays compared to previous forecasts.

In parallel, both general and specialized press have highlighted how **delays and industrial competition** (new projects, upgrades, and alternative joint ventures) increase pressure on the Franco-German program.

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What Options for the French “Transition Tank”

The debate, at least in general terms, revolves around three paths:

1. “Off-the-shelf” Purchase

IFRI describes the idea of purchasing **Leopard 2** as the most immediate option on paper, but with two obstacles: **delivery times** (already loaded chains, difficult to see deliveries before 2030) and **potentially limited industrial return**, with the risk of eroding the national tank base.

2. Alternative Foreign Solution (e.g., South Korean K2)

IFRI also notes that a path could involve the **K2**, even hypothesizing faster initial deliveries (under certain conditions) and evolving partnerships.

3. National/“Sovereign” Transitional Development

A hypothesis that preserves skills and the supply chain but requires political will and

investments. In IFRI's reconstruction, a possible “bridge tank” should remain in a manageable weight range (approximately **45-55 tons**), integrate **active protection**, counter-drone capabilities, and a more modern set of sensors/actuators, also with the use of **organic drones**.

Why the “Imminent” Decision Matters Beyond France

If Paris is indeed about to decide, as indicated by Zone Militaire's report, the choice will have effects on three levels:

- **Operational:** avoiding a “capability gap” in heavy armored maneuvering just as Europe revisits Ukrainian lessons (drones, loitering munitions, widespread anti-tank threats).
- **Industrial:** whether to preserve a national value chain (and thus autonomy, export, maintenance, technological sovereignty).
- **European:** the coherence between the national “bridge” and MGCS will condition interoperability, future standards, and the credibility of major cooperative programs.

In summary, the hypothesis of the **transition tank** arises from a simple reality: between Leclerc XLR and MGCS, there is a time window long enough to become a strategic vulnerability. It is there that the “real” urgency of the decision plays out.

News link: <https://www.air-defense.net/actualit%C3%A9s/82773>