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**HQ Supreme Allied Commander Transformation  
Directorate of Multi-Domain Force Development**

Norfolk, Virginia | USA



ACT/MDFD/INNOV/TT-1619/SER:NU:029

TO: See Distribution

SUBJECT: **INNOVATION CONTINUUM 2026 - SPARK CALLING NOTICE**

DATE: 16 January 2026

REFERENCES: A. HQ SACT, Save-the-Date, Innovation Continuum 2026, dated 05 December 2025.  
B. HQ SACT, PP Innovation Continuum Process, dated 01 March 2024.  
C. HQ SACT, Innovation Continuum 2024 Final Report Vol I, Vol II, dated 04 March 2025.

1. The Innovation Continuum (IC) (Reference A) focuses on the creation and implementation of new ideas, technologies, and methods to advance NATO Military Instrument of Power (MIoP). It drives the development of cutting-edge solutions that address emerging threats and operational challenges. By generating and rapid adoption of innovative concepts, this continuum supports measures that ensure military forces remain ahead of potential adversaries and are equipped with the most advanced tools and techniques.

2. In its 2026 edition it is directly supporting besides the Warfare Development Agenda, Multi-Domain Operations, and Digital Transformation programmes also SACT's Beacon Projects 2026. This initiative offers an opportunity to all NATO Enterprise entities, NATO Nations, Academia and selected Industry to join Allied Command Transformation (ACT) efforts to increase, via collaboration, the value of innovative products in support of Warfare Development and to accelerate their delivery to the warfighters.

3. SPARK 26 is led by ACT, and is supported by Host Nation Bulgaria and the GATE Institute at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The event is open to all of NATO Enterprise and NATO Nations, their industries, research institutions and academia.

4. SPARK 26 is the opening and 360 screening event of IC26 – it will identify technologies, projects and experiments to be elevated by the 2026 IC cycle in a collaborative experimentation environment. It will provide enabled by Emerging and Disruptive Technologies a platform for operational experimentation, demonstration and spot-on innovation.

5. This year's edition will be capitalizing on recent advances in Quantum, Autonomy, AI, Sensor Data Fusion, Next Generation Networks technologies, and will address following operational themes:

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- a. JISR in the High North.
- b. Layered Counter-UAS Initiative.
- c. Next Generation Targeting.
- d. AI Next Gen C4ISR.
- e. Smart Logistics and Sustainment.
- f. Electronic Warfare .
- g. Cognitive Warfare.
- h. AI Audacious Training.

6. Nations are kindly invited to nominate Working Group Leaders for specific projects.

7. Organisation. SPARK will be run in the four following syndicates:

- a. IC Syndicate – Admin/RLS/CIS/Budget/Legal/STRATCOM/EVAL.
- b. Operational Syndicate: Operational Experiments and Wargames.
- c. Technology Syndicate: Technology demonstations.
- d. DIBAX Syndicate: Next Generation Communications and digital backbone

8. Time/Location. SPARK 26 takes place from 24 to 26 of February 2026 at the Campus of the GATE Institute at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. It will start daily at 0830am and close at 0500 pm.

9. Administration. Information regarding registration is provided in Annex A and initial administrative instructions (including accommodation) are provided in Annex B. Additional information when available/required will be desiminated by email and posted on the VISTA information portal. Read ahead materials are available by using the VISTA Portal link provided in Annex A.

10. Points of Contact. The points of contact for SPARK 2026 are:

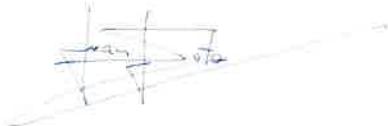
- a. Innovation Continuum (IC26) Lead –  
Mr. Krzysztof Skurzak, Email: [Krzysztof.Skurzak@nato.int](mailto:Krzysztof.Skurzak@nato.int)  
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b. Innovation Continuum Coordination –  
LtCol (DEU Army) Thorsten Ritter, Email: [Thorsten.Ritter@nato.int](mailto:Thorsten.Ritter@nato.int)  
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FOR THE SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER TRANSFORMATION:



Juan Jose SOTO RODRIGUEZ  
Major General, ESP A  
Deputy Chief of Staff, Multi- Domain Force Development

ANNEXES:

A. Administrative Instructions for INNOVATION CONTINUUM 2026 – SPARK.  
B. General Information Package for INNOVATION CONTINUUM 2026 – SPARK.

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**ADMINISTRATIVE INSTRUCTIONS  
INNOVATION CONTINUUM 2026 – SPARK**

1. Introduction. This Annex provides supplementary administrative information to the HQ SACT calling notice for SPARK 26, that will be held in Sofia/Bulgaria from 24 to 26 of February 2026.
2. Venue. SPARK 26 will be held onsite at the facilities of the GATE Institute at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", located at 6 Shipka Str., Sofia 1504, Bulgaria. A virtual participation will be enabled for the main and syndicate sessions. Respective VTC links will be available on the VISTA platform.
3. Registration. Participants are required to register at the following link:
  - a. <https://events.innovationhub-act.org/event/13/>
  - b. The registration portal will be active from 12 January to 13 February 2026.
4. In-Processing. In-processing will start on 24 February, 0800 – 0900am at the Reception Area of the GATE Institute:
  - a. 5 James Bourchier Boulevard  
Sofia 1164  
Bulgaria
  - b. Ensure to be registered upfront and bring a copy, printed or electronic, of your registration confirmation. Only registered NATO Nations' entities and other organisations/industry sponsored by a NATO Nation, will be permitted access to SPARK. Every participant will be issued a Conference Badge.
5. Security. SPARK 26 is a "NATO UNCLASSIFIED" event. Non-NATO entity participants will be required to sign a non-disclosure statement during the registration process for protection of research data within NATO S&T. This NDA will be valid for the complete 2026 IC cycle. Participants will be required to wear their Conference Badge visible during their attendance to the event and to get access to the SPARK conference area in general.
6. Conference Fee. There is no conference fee for SPARK 26.
7. VISTA Portal: The following page on VISTA Portal will be used to further coordinate the event:  
[https://tide.act.nato.int/mediawiki/vista/index.php/SPARK\\_2026](https://tide.act.nato.int/mediawiki/vista/index.php/SPARK_2026)

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8. Transportation. There will be no shuttle service provided. At the GATE Campus no parking space will be available. It is strongly recommended to use an accommodation in walking distance to the event or public transport.

9. Attire. The dress code for SPARK 26 is Business Casual. Uniforms are strongly discouraged.

10. Language. SPARK 26 will be conducted in English.

11. Participation. The event is open to NATO entities and NATO Nations. Australia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Switzerland and Ukraine are invited Partner Nations. Industry can participate via RFI or if being sponsored by a NATO or Partner Nation.

12. Draft Agenda. The general, generic agenda will follow this outline:

Time	Topic	Lead	Location
<b>Tuesday, 24 February</b>			
0800 - 0900	In-Processing Innovators' Networking Morning	IC Syndicate	GATE Reception
0900 – 1200	Welcome and Plenary session	IC Lead / HN	GATE Auditorium
1200 – 1300	Lunch Break		
1300 – 1645	Syndicate work	Syndicate Leads	Breakout rooms
1645 – 1700	Wrap-up, Q&A	IC Lead	AIH
1700 – 1800	<i>Icebreaker</i>	IC Lead	<i>GATE Reception area</i>
<b>Wednesday, 25 February</b>			
0830 – 0900	Innovators' Networking Morning	IC Syndicate	GATE Reception
0900 – 0915	Morning D&G	IC Lead	GATE Auditorium
0915 – 1645	Syndicate work	Syndicate Leads	Breakout rooms
1200 – 1300	Lunch Break		
1300 – 1330	VISTA training	IC Syndicate	GATE Plenary
1645 – 1700	Wrap-up, Q&A	IC Lead	GATE Auditorium
<b>Thursday, 26 February</b>			
0830 – 0900	Innovators' Networking Morning	IC Syndicate	GATE Reception
0900 – 0915	Morning D&G	IC Lead	GATE Auditorium
0915 – 1500	Syndicate work	Syndicate Leads	Breakout rooms

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12:00 – 1300	Lunch Break		
1300 – 1330	VISTA training	IC Syndicate	GATE Auditorium
1500 – 1645	Out briefings	Syndicate leads	GATE Auditorium
1645 – 1700	Closing remarks	IC Lead / HN	GATE Auditorium

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ANNEX B TO

ACT/MDFD/INNOV/TT-1619/SER:NU:029

DATED 16 JAN 26

**GENERAL INFORMATION PACKAGE  
INNOVATION CONTINUUM 2026 – SPARK**



**SOFIA**  
- BULGARIA -

1. **Location.** SPARK 26 will be held in GATE Institute at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", located at 5 James Bourchier Boulevard, Sofia 1164, Bulgaria. More information about GATE is available on the GATE web site at <https://www.gate-ai.eu/en/home/> .

a. Sofia is the historic capital of Bulgaria, known for blending ancient Roman ruins with modern life, nestled at the foot of Vitosha Mountain for year-round recreation. It's one of Europe's oldest cities, rich in religious sites like the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and the ancient Church of St. George, with a unique "triangle of religious tolerance" featuring mosques, churches, and synagogues nearby. Sofia serves as Bulgaria's political, economic, and cultural hub, offering museums, parks, a vibrant cafe scene, and a surprisingly accessible mountain escape. (<https://www.visitsofia.bg/en/>).

b. The GATE Institute is located in a park environment, surrounded by the historical buildings of the Faculties of Chemistry and Pharmacy, Mathematics and Informatics, and Physics of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the campus on James Bourchier Blvd. All these buildings bear the spirit of the time in which they were built. Similarly now, the new building keeps pace with modern trends and is simple and understandable, aesthetically sound and simple.

c. Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (Bulgarian: Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“) is a public research university in Sofia, Bulgaria. It is the oldest institution of higher education in Bulgaria.

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D. Founded on 1 October 1888, the edifice of the university was constructed between 1924 and 1934 and has an area of 18,624 m<sup>2</sup> and a total of 324 premises. The university has 16 faculties and three departments, where over 21,000 students receive their education. The current rector is Prof. Dr. Georgi Valchev.

2. **Getting there.** GATE is located at 5 James Bourchier Blvd., 1164 Sofia, Bulgaria (in the Science Park of Sofia University's Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics). You can use the following Google maps pin: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/EbSmaf6wXBuvBqay6>

a. **Main transport connections to GATE:**

- (1) By bus: Take line 94 or line 102 to Divinity School bus stop. Afterwards, GATE is at ~ 7-minute walking distance.
- (2) By tram: Take line 10 or line 15 to Milin Kamak St. bus stop. Afterwards, GATE is at ~ 3-minute walking distance.
- (3) By metro: Take the blue line (No2) to European Union or James Bourchier metro station. Afterwards, GATE is at ~ 3-minute walking distance.
- (4) By taxi: GATE is positioned in the city centre, so using a taxi would be a convenient and relatively inexpensive option. We recommend the Yellow Taxi app on Google Play or App Store or the TaxiMe app on Google Play or App Store.

b. **From the airport to GATE:**

- (1) By bus and tram: Take bus 84 or bus 184 to Gen Gurko St. bus stop, then take tram 10 or tram 15 to Milin Kamak St. bus stop. Full route on Google Maps: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/RNBq4SSeLzU7xLU6>. The price is 0.82 EUR and travel time ~1 hour.
- (2) By metro: Take the yellow line (No4) to Serdika metro station, then change for the blue line (No2) to European Union or James Bourchier metro station. Full route on Google Maps: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/kWRnwvKCXMt7Zj5JA>. The price is 0.82 EUR and the travel time ~45 mins.
- (3) By taxi: Download the Yellow Taxi app on Google Play or App Store or the TaxiMe app on Google Play or App Store. Full route on Google Maps: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/c85VXveXumSN13pC8>. The price is ~10 EUR and the travel time ~30 mins, depending on travel.

c. **Travel tips:** Sofia traffic is generally manageable, but peak hours (08:00–10:00 and 17:00–19:00) should be considered. Public transportation is efficient, affordable, and well-connected to the city center.

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3. **Recommended Accommodations:** Given the central location of GATE, it is advisable to seek accommodation in Sofia city center or nearby districts, which offer easy access to the venue as well as to restaurants and cultural attractions. Here are several recommended hotels with varying amenities:

- a. InterContinental Sofia: <https://sofia.intercontinental.com/en>
- b. Grand Hotel Sofia: <https://www.grandhotelsofia.bg>
- c. Rosslyn Central Park Hotel Sofia: <https://centralparkhotel.bg>
- d. Hotel Marinela: <https://hotel-marinela.com>
- e. Best Western Lozenetz: <https://www.lozenetzhotel.com>
- f. Grand Hotel Millennium: <https://grandhotelmillenniumsofia.bg>

4. **Recommended Restaurants:** Sofia offers a diverse culinary scene, combining traditional Bulgarian cuisine with international dining options, modern bistros, and lively bars. The city center, in particular, hosts a wide variety of restaurants, cafés, and nightlife venues within walking distance or a short taxi ride from the GATE Institute. Here are several recommendations:

- a. Shtastlivetsa Restaurant – Vitoshka – Classic European-influenced menu with familiar comfort dishes like grilled meats, salads and pasta in friendly portion sizes: <http://www.shtastliveca.com/>.
- b. Moma Bulgarian Food and Wine – A modern take on traditional Bulgarian cuisine where you can taste familiar local dishes prepared from classic recipes with some contemporary touches; website: <https://moma-restaurant.com/>.
- c. KOMAT Restaurant – Contemporary European fare with clean flavors and local seasonal ingredients, good for a modern tasting experience: <https://dotsofia.com/bg/restaurant>
- d. Raketa Rakia Bar. A place for traditional Bulgarian dishes and rakia with straightforward, hearty flavors and some modern touches: <http://raketarakiabar.bg/>
- e. Cosmos Restaurant. Contemporary Bulgarian and European-leaning cuisine focusing on locally sourced ingredients and inventive preparations: <https://cosmosbg.com/>
- f. Nikolas 0/360. Fine dining that blends Balkan and Asian elements with refined techniques and well-selected seafood and meats: <http://nikolas.bg/>
- g. SASA Fashion Food. A mix of Asian fusion tastes including sushi and pan-Asian dishes with clean, familiar flavors: <https://sasa.bg/>

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5. **Places to See / Things to Do:** Sofia is a city where ancient history meets contemporary urban life. Visitors can enjoy cultural landmarks, museums, green spaces, and vibrant street life. If you want to explore the city with a guided tour, we recommend booking a tour with Free Sofia Tour who offer various options everyday: <https://freesofiatour.com/>

a. **Attractions:**

- (1) Alexander Nevsky Cathedral – One of the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedrals, known for its monumental scale, golden domes, and calm interior atmosphere.
- (2) St. Sofia Church – A 6th-century brick basilica whose simple architecture and long history gave the city its name.
- (3) National Archaeological Museum – A museum presenting artifacts from Bulgaria's ancient, Thracian, Roman, and medieval past.
- (4) Boyana Church – A UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its well-preserved medieval frescoes from the 13th century.
- (5) Square 500 – A modern gallery complex displaying Bulgarian and international art from different periods.
- (6) Royal Palace Gallery – Part of the National Gallery, housed in the former royal palace and focused on Bulgarian fine art.
- (7) Serdika Largo – An open archaeological area revealing Roman streets and ruins beneath the modern city center.
- (8) Regional History Museum of Sofia – A museum tracing Sofia's development from antiquity to modern times, located in the former central baths.
- (9) Saint George Rotunda – A 4th-century red-brick rotunda, considered the oldest preserved building in Sofia, known for its layered frescoes.
- (10) National Palace of Culture (NDK) – A large cultural complex hosting concerts, exhibitions, and events in the heart of the city.
- (11) Vitosha Boulevard – Sofia's main pedestrian street, lined with shops, cafés, and restaurants, with views toward Vitosha Mountain.

b. **Nature and Leisure:**

- (1) Vitosha Mountain – Located just outside the city, offering hiking, panoramic views, and nature escapes.

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(2) Borisova Garden – One of Sofia's largest and most popular parks for relaxation and walks.

**6. Additional Practical Information:**

- a. The official currency in Bulgaria is the Euro (EUR). Card payments are widely accepted throughout the city in hotels, restaurants, and taxis in central Sofia.
- b. The standard emergency number is 112.
- c. Electricity supply is 230V / 50Hz, and Type F (Schuko) sockets are used, which are compatible with most European plugs.
- d. Free Wi-Fi access is available on the GATE Institute premises, and reliable mobile and public Wi-Fi coverage is common across the city center.

7. **Final Note:** Sofia combines accessibility, cultural depth, and a growing innovation ecosystem, making it a welcoming and inspiring location for international events and collaboration. The GATE Institute team is looking forward to welcoming you and making your stay productive and exciting.

