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POLISH SPACE ACTIVITIES IN THE EVE OF ESA ACCESSION

Abstract

In late 2012 Poland should join the European Space Agency (ESA) as its 20th member. This will be the end of a lengthy accession procedure and the beginning of a new era for the Polish space sector. The accession is a result of a successful completion of integration stages, which started in 1994 with the Cooperation Agreement. Next, the European Cooperating State (ECS) agreement was signed in 2007, followed by the Plan For European Cooperating State (PECS). Finally, at the end of November 2011, negotiations between Poland and ESA have begun and as of February 2012 are still continuing. If these negotiations are successful, Poland will join ESA at the end of this year. The exact Polish financial contribution to ESA is not yet known, but estimates suggest values from 15 up to 36 million Euro in the first several years after the integration.

In parallel, for many years Polish companies and institutions participated in several European Commission Framework Programmes in the space section. However the general opinion is that Polish companies were rather unrepresented in GMES-related and Galileo-related projects.

All together, Polish companies and institutions have had several opportunities to participate in space-related projects and grants over the last few years. Starting from 2011, an intensification of space-related activities has been noted, also outside of commercial ventures. Moreover, first fully-Polish student and scientific satellite projects were at advanced stages of development at that time. This resulted in increased awareness and acceptance of space activities in Poland.

As the full integration with ESA is approaching, a status review of the infant space sector begins to show forthcoming opportunities and threats. Is the Polish space sector ready to participate properly in ESA programmes? Are the Polish companies ready to compete and cooperate with other European counterparts? What are the major goals for Poland in ESA? What is the political support to the integration with ESA? Are the universities ready to properly educate the sector's future staff? This presentation aims to summarize the current state of Polish space activities together with a presentation of the most notable achievements and a political-economical analysis of opportunities and threats.