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ESA'S CHOICE OF FUTURES: ENVISAT REMOVAL OR FIRST LIABILITY CASE

**Abstract**

In 2013 the European Space Agency's Envisat satellite will be decommissioned. It has a cross section of 26 meters, a mass of eight tons and is currently in a polar orbit at an altitude of 780 km. Once exposed to natural forces and to the present space debris population in this orbit, there is a considerable probability that it will collide with other space objects and be dismembered. The orbital life of this satellite at its current altitude is 150 years. The question arises if ESA will perform a removal manoeuvre or take the risk of liability in case of damage to space objects of another State or to persons or property on board such space objects. This article will address ESA's decisions on Envisat's end-of-life procedures and analyse them under present general international law and space law.