

58th IISL COLLOQUIUM ON THE LAW OF OUTER SPACE (E7)
Legal Issues of Space Traffic Management (4)

Author: Mr. Alexander Soucek
European Space Agency (ESA/ESRIN), Italy, alexander.soucek@esa.int

THE CURRENT PRACTICE OF THE EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY IN REGISTERING ITS SPACE
OBJECTS LAUNCHED INTO EARTH ORBIT OR BEYOND

Abstract

In 1978, the European Space Agency (ESA) declared acceptance of the rights and obligations provided for in the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space. In doing so, ESA became the first inter-governmental organisation to respond to the registration requirements established under international space law. In 2014, based on more than three decades of best practice, ESA established an internal instruction for the registration and notification to the UN Secretary-General of its space objects, complemented in 2015 by a comprehensive, multi-functional “ESA Space Object Register”. This Register, representing the ‘national registry’ which ESA is obliged to establish and maintain under Article II.1 Registration Convention, marks a milestone development by being linked to ESA’s state-of-the-art technical space object database, DISCOS. The Agency’s new registration policy and the “ESA Space Object Register” have the potential to serve as a model of registration practice in the context of a dynamically developing space debris environment, the augmentation and diversification of space actors, the necessity of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space and the concept of Space Traffic Management. They represent a practical example of responding to the considerations of the “registration practice” resolution A/RES/62/101 and a contribution to the responsible use of outer space by ESA and its Member States.