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HOW TO RESUSCITATE THE INTERNATIONAL CODE OF CONDUCT!

Abstract

Main author: Xavier Pasco, FRS, Paris, France Co-author: Serge Plattard, ESPI Regarding space surveillance, space traffic management, and long-term sustainability of space activities, a number of initiatives have been started since the late 2000's, but none of them have yielded so far to practical results. The UN Governmental Group of Experts (GGE) recommendations are still waiting for more than just a procedural implementation, the report of the COPUOS Working Group on long-term sustainability of outer space activities (LTSSA) is in the drafting process, while the discussions about a draft on an International Code of Conduct (ICoC), first released by the EU in 2008, stalled in July 2015 despite previous open ended consultations. Considering the population increase of active and inactive space objects, with massive LEO constellations to come, the unresolved consensus about commonly accepted rules of the road is posing a growing threat for the sustainability and the safety of space activities. In order to provide new impetus, this paper proposes to adopt a novel and practical bottom-up approach aiming at restoring confidence among stakeholders through enhanced exchanges of information and more transparency in the field that is critical to all endeavours to ensure continued benefit from the use of space, that is Space Surveillance and Tracking (SST). This could be achieved through a basic common platform, in a cooperative format assuring that one system is not given precedence over other, even if the current de facto asymmetry of means is recognized by all the players. Following an update of the various SST capabilities, such a demarche involving both institutional and private actors could take the following shape: i) definition of the nature of relevant information and its format to be exchanged among the different stakeholders running space surveillance systems; ii) agreement on the status and level of points of contact; iii) facilitation of the feasibility of establishing agreements between space surveillance and tracking operators, possibly pushing it to a multi-lateral agreement. We recommend a step by step approach, based on a corpus of agreed initiatives along a realistic time line, later to be focused on the more sensitive measures once confident and transparent cooperative processes are established. The proposed approach would assist in removing barriers of mistrust, and with collaborative work becoming a standard, a restart of discussions on the ICoC would be facilitated, hopefully leading to a successful negotiation that would guarantee an efficient, trusted and robust Code.