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Regional cooperation in space: policies, governance and legal tools (1)

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APSCO AFTER ITS FIRST DECADE: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF ITS CURRENT POLITICAL
AND LEGAL COOPERATIVE POTENTIAL AND RELATED IMPEDIMENTS

Abstract

Since the Convention of the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO) was signed in 2005 and entered into force in 2006, the member states of APSCO commenced with certain regional space-related undertakings to overcome national limitations in the space sector and to improve their socio-economic development. However, with regard to the political and legal status quo in the space sector, I hold that they have not yet harnessed their present issue area-specific potential to cooperate within APSCO to the fullest extent. Applying an appropriately extended theory of Liberalism to analyse APSCO and its members' space-related policies, regulations and activities in each of the organisation's assigned issue areas, my research academically evaluates this potential, including related impediments, in detail. Subsequently, it proposes recommendations to support APSCO's peaceful and sustainable cooperative evolution for the benefit of the people in the region. Moreover, my study enables other actors to more easily recognise their space programmes' synergy potential with APSCO or at least to better prepare for future space-related developments in Asia.

In general, my research results show that the APSCO members follow a reasonable cooperative path in the organisation by concentrating on education and trainings to improve their human capital in the space sector and on space-related capability-building, for example, in remote sensing, disaster management and navigation. Nevertheless, the analysis of the APSCO members' policies, regulations and activities also provides clear evidence that a much greater political and legal potential for cooperation among those states can be exhausted within APSCO's assigned issue areas. Relevant political and legal impediments hampering APSCO's cooperative potential identified by my research encompass some members' slow implementation rate of national space policies, intricate domestic space-related decision-making systems, and simultaneous adherence to the policy principles of independent development and of cooperation. Besides that, APSCO appears to depend too much on a single member's – namely China's – willingness to contribute, whereas Iran, the second most advanced space-faring state in APSCO, had been, until recently, strongly inhibited in its space activities by international sanctions.

Based on these overall results, my recommendations to the APSCO members to better exploit their organisation's potential and to address some of the aforementioned related challenges comprise the implementation of a joint high-profile project, the establishment of joint S&T research centres, a revision of specific policy principles, and the recruitment of further sophisticated Asian space-faring states in a timely manner.