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Assuring a Safe, Secure and Sustainable Space Environment for Space Activities (4)

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SECURITY IN SPACE: CHALLENGES TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND OPTIONS FOR
MOVING FORWARD

Abstract

With outer space becoming increasingly congested, contested and competitive, greater attention is being placed on the long-term safety, security and sustainability of outer space activities. Promoting responsible behaviour in outer space and building multilateral consensus on normative rules to limit the proliferation of space debris is of paramount importance not only for established space-faring nations, but also for newcomers. For many years, the European Union, individual states and other organizations around the world have been discussing how to conduct and communicate about space activities in order to enhance confidence and prevent mistrust.

Building on a study on space security by the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), the objective of this paper is three-fold. First, it examines the progress being made within multilateral fora, notably at the United Nations level, with respect to space security. Particular attention is given to the EU's major diplomatic initiative on an International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities, the report of the UN Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities, and the final report of the Working Group on the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities. Second, it analyses the main challenges to international cooperation in space security with particular regard to the aforementioned initiatives. Third, it offers a number of recommendations for moving forward to ensure that space will continue to be accessible and used for peaceful purposes and societal benefit.

This study has found that space-faring nations have been slow to adopt and implement voluntary guidelines, even those for which they have expressed support; that the primary challenges to international cooperation are diverging preferences on how to ensure sustainable space security and concerns deriving from potential limits on freedom of action in outer space; and that the EU is still in the process of developing its role as a security actor in space. In a more complex and connected world, no one state will be able to impose rules unilaterally or to act alone to ensure security in space. Improved international cooperation, both multilaterally and bilaterally, can play a major role in reducing tensions, altering threat perceptions and helping facilitate shared activities to protect space systems and prevent space from becoming a new area of conflict. Good communication and effective diplomacy can help create a community of stakeholders sharing common goals and values with regard to the long-term sustainability of the outer space environment.