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

Author: Dr. Serge Plattard
University College London (UCL), Austria, s.plattard@ucl.ac.uk

ENHANCING EUROPE'S STANCE ON SPACE SECURITY

Abstract

Space matters for the world and for Europe. Yet, space is increasingly congested and contested, posing a mounting challenge for assuring a safe, secure and sustainable environment for space activities. To respond to such a challenge that can only get tougher with the planned LEO mega constellations, a number of political, legal, as well as technical initiatives has been proposed over the past 10 years or so. Except for some improvements of technical nature, these initiatives have not delivered so far any concrete results. China and Russia continue pushing for a PPWT (draft treaty on the prevention of placement of weapons in outer space, the threat of use of force against outer space objects), the UN COPUOS ST Subcommittee Working Group on long-term sustainability of outer space activities is still experiencing difficulties for delivering an agreed list of guidelines as a major marker of the 2018 UNISPACE+50 Conference, and Europe is looking at how the International Code of Conduct, which stalled in July 2015, could be rekindled. Fortunately, the space debris mitigation guidelines are quite well followed, the US space surveillance network (USSSN) is funded for modernization that will allow palpable improvement in space debris tracking, up to 250 000 space objects, and five European countries started a consortium to pull and share their SST capacities. Having set the scene of the current situation and analysed the reasons for so modest achievements since the signature of the Outer Space Treaty, the paper proposes some avenues along which Europe shall move to be a recognized actor in its own rights, speaking with one voice on space security, as part of a collective security endeavour for all nations. These include: i) preparation of a revised Code of Conduct, requiring the support of the United States as a start, but not only, that could be then introduced by several member states for discussion at the UN, ii) development at the EU level and its member states of active consultations and leading diplomatic initiatives to fluidize exchanges between the COPUOS and the CD: the dual-use nature of space necessitates now an adapted arena covering all the space security questions, leaving behind the aged and ill-suited cold war settings, and iii) decision to fund at a significantly higher level the undergoing European SST consortium set up in 2014, moving Europe to a full partner status with the USSSN, opening possibilities for renewed EU/national-US SST/SSA agreements.