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SPACE TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT: TOP PRIORITY FOR SAFETY OPERATIONS

Abstract

The Outer Space Treaty, as the ‘Magna Carta of outer space’, should remain untouched and rather than seeking to amend it, new instruments could be introduced that correspondingly address the present legal uncertainties.

The absence of an international space traffic management system and the ever-growing need for international cooperation in the conduct of space activities, together with the unprecedented growth of non-governmental entities in the space industry, has brought to light the actual gaps in space law and the need for a set of ‘rules of the road’ without which an incident will more probably than not happen. The absence of norms or any standards for the behaviour of launching and operation of space objects makes it difficult to assure the safety of air space for both national and foreign users. Generally, Space traffic management has been defined as the set of technical and regulatory provisions for promoting (i) safe access into outer space, (ii) the conduction of operations in outer space, and (iii) the return of space objects from outer space free from interference of any form.

This paper shall consequently address selected issues of space traffic management, namely issues that relate to the launching phase and to orbital traffic including collision avoidance and the concept of fault in case of damage caused in outer space. Furthermore, this paper shall strive to present the views on space traffic management in different parts of the world, namely the EU and the US in view of the latest Orbital Traffic Management Study– Final Report prepared for NASA on 21 November 2016 and the much expected 2nd edition of the IAA study, entitled “STM: Towards a Roadmap for Implementation”.