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The relationship between space law and cyberlaw, and other recent developments in space law (5)

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THE MOON VILLAGE PROJECT: A LEGAL RAMIFICATION

Abstract

In 2016 ESA Director General Jan Wörner announced a new project: the Moon Village. It is conceived as a free multi-user platform on an open-architecture basis, a partnership which should serve the exploration of the Solar system and contribute to life on Earth. The partial settlement or “base” on the Moon should be used for a multiplicity of experiments of medical, architectural, pharmaceutical, astrophysical and life-sciences nature. The knowledge gathered through the Moon Village should contribute to various global challenges for life on Earth such as climate change, migration, scarcity of resources, military conflicts etc.

The Moon Village is envisaged as an innovative cooperation programme between spacefaring nations in which each participant will be free to collaborate up to its own capacities. In this way, a free and open access space exploration platform will become available for experiments, business models, and scientific and commercial activities, but also for exchange of knowledge and capabilities. Through collaboration between different partners (both governmental and private) with different expertise, a variety of contributions and high effectiveness of the outcome is expected. The need for such an undertaking is highlighted by the fact that the only experimental “base” in outer space – the International Space Station – is expected to remain active for only one more decade. This poses the question on how future space exploration should look like.

So far legal prerequisites and consequences of this project are scarcely discussed. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to give orientation which legal ramifications such a plan should observe. It will not consider the legal aspects of ‘colonization’ as this has expressly been denied as a purpose of the Moon Village but it will look into the scope of the regulation of human activities in outer space as provided by the Treaties on space law.