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International cooperation in using space for sustainable development: The “Space2030” agenda (1)

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IN SEARCH OF THE EUROPEAN WAY FOR SPACE: RECONCILING COOPERATION AND
INDEPENDENCE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPACE AGENDA 2030

Abstract

In the wake of the SpaceAgenda2030, Europe needs to reevaluate its position in the global space industry and its goals for space activities. While it has both a strong economy capable of supporting such activities, as well as the necessary technical and scientific expertise, Europe lacks a clear vision for its future space endeavors. As such, European leaders should work towards defining or redefining three major aspects of our common space policies: a political goal, a legal framework and a communication policy. At the political level, it is not only a question for Europe to have an original and ambitious exploration program. It's also about independence. Europe's ability to position itself as a true space power and to end its dependency on other countries' space capabilities depends on its ability to produce a comprehensive plan for the next few years. The conflict in Ukraine and its impact on the launcher industry, especially Vega and Soyouz, raises the question of an independent access to space. The role of joint missions and their future, notably ExoMars, also brings up questions about the diplomatic and strategic nature of cooperation in space. Furthermore, Europe, by its history and its political nature, is naturally predisposed to be a leader in space regulation, as much on the question of debris and space surveillance as on the exploitation of resources and the scientific preservation of celestial bodies. It must, however, decide on a unified legal framework in order to best further its interests. The multiple overlapping jurisdictions of national space agencies, the ESA and the European Union pose a challenge to this goal. A new form of European space cooperation must therefore take form. Finally, European space still lacks a defined geopolitical image and narrative. If many European space companies have started to adapt their communication to the new audience of space programs, the Space 2030 agenda should further encourage politicians to take hold of the space culture and insist on a better structure of the civil society. Such structuring is essential to fully defend the benefits of space in our daily lives. Europe has all the resources necessary to be a true leading space power. But to do so, it must redefine its strategic objectives with pragmatism in the face of the international context. Once again, Europe could be a wonderful laboratory of experimentation for space cooperation, while also gaining its full independence for space activities.