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SPACE, DEFENCE AND SECURITY: COOPERATION BETWEEN ESA AND EU TO ENHANCE
EUROPE'S GEOPOLITICAL ROLE

Abstract

The interconnection between space, defence and security is known and recognized. Among others, the latter have always been at heart of space activities but in the last few years we have been witnessing an increased interest in these dimensions in Europe. In the past 20 years, the NewSpace economy and the birth of new spacefaring nations, the increased interconnection between space and new domains, among others, have been contributing to open the space sector to several factors of influence. On the one hand, these phenomena have unlocked space for new actors, new scientific and technological developments in the upstream and downstream. On the other, they have exposed space to new threats. For instance, the advent of mega-constellations, the increased number of space objects and unregulated activities in outer space have been worsening the space debris issue and endangering human and robotic missions. The use of new technologies have strengthened ties between space and other domains, such as the cyber world. Russia's current war against Ukraine, strongly condemned by the international community as an unjustified act of violence and a violation of international law, has been raising questions regarding cooperation in space and opened new scenarios. Since the outset, space has been one of the strategic domains in which the sanctions war is being fought and the subject of threats that risk undermining not only the safety and security of the sector itself, but also the national and European security, with many strategic sectors and infrastructures heavily relying on space systems and technologies. This paper will firstly investigate some of Europe's most recent strategies, policies and plans in the space, defence and security sector. Selected examples are the latest communication of the European Commission (EC) regarding initiatives in EU's critical areas for defence and security, including space, to contribute to the EU Strategic Compass on Security and Defence; the EC's communication in Space Traffic Management (STM); the EC's Action Plan on Synergies between civil, defence and space industries. Secondly, it will analyse the impact of the most recent geopolitical events on these and upcoming actions and activities, as well as on the European space sector. Thirdly, it will propose a strategy based on space cooperation between EU and ESA member states to increase Europe's relevance in defence and security as well as its role as a geopolitical player by exploiting binding instruments as regulations and directives.