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A SET OF PRINCIPLES FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON LUNAR EXPLORATION PROJECTS: A PERSPECTIVE FROM CHINA

Abstract

Thanks to the progress of science and technology in recent years, the exploration and use of the Moon has shown great prospects, which is highly encouraging to all countries in the world. It is the shared expectation of all countries to conduct extensive international cooperation in the exploration and use of the Moon. More and more international lunar exploration projects are being proposed as more and more countries are interested in sending probes or payloads to the Moon. Diversity, sustainability and interconnectedness are among the most important features that differentiate between the new wave of lunar exploration activities and the moon race during the cold war. Principles that could guide cooperation on such kinds of projects are needed since the current international legal regime is not enough in meeting new requirements. Internationally accepted guiding principles should be developed to move the lunar projects forward and thus enhance cooperation in the peaceful exploration and utilization of the Moon and its surrounding orbital space. A set of principles for cooperation on lunar exploration projects is proposed as a result of a study jointly conducted by a group of Chinese space scientists, space system engineers and space law researchers. Open cooperation, science excellence, environmental protection, coordination and mutual assistance, mutual benefit and settlement of disputes are identified as top level principles that could guide cooperation on lunar exploration projects. Each of the principles can be further decomposed into several subprinciples. Besides, abiding by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies ("Outer Space Treaty") as well as other relevant international legal instruments, and taking into account the needs of developing countries, are considered as fundamental for successful cooperation on lunar exploration projects. An introduction to the joint study and its results will be elaborated in detail.