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SPACE APPLICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN THE MIDDLE
EAST: THE CASE OF LEBANON

Abstract

Home of the Phoenician civilization, Lebanon has always been a cradle of forerunners and innovators. During the Cold War, the then so-called “Switzerland of the Middle East” joined the Space Race between USA and USSR, albeit in the slow lane. In 1960, an ingenious group of academics and entrepreneurs created the Rocket Society which, although established as a private initiative, laid the foundations of the Lebanese space programme and showed the Arab world the way to the stars, so that the Cedar IV rocket was launched in 1963, reaching the height of 145 km, close to the altitude of satellites in low-earth orbit (LEO). A few years later, on 23 February 1967, Lebanon was the first Middle Eastern Arab country to sign the Outer Space Treaty. Unfortunately, the civil war that broke out in 1975 tragically changed the trajectory of the Lebanese space programme, interrupting it. However, in 1989 the Ta’if Agreements put an end to the war so that Lebanon could resume its ambitions both on Earth and in space. Today, aware of the potential impacts of space-related activities - even on developing countries - and in the wake of the exponential growth of the space sector, especially in the Middle Eastern region, Lebanon is revamping its space ambitions and increasingly adopting space-based technologies in order to face the numerous societal, economic and environmental fragilities confronting the country. The purpose of this paper is to provide a general description of the Middle Eastern context and recall the history of Lebanon’s pioneering contribution to the development of the space domain in the Middle East, focusing on the last 40 years and with an analysis of how today’s space applications can help the country recover its historical posture and grandeur.