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PROTECTION OF PATENTS IN OUTER SPACE. COULD BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY BE A
SUFFICIENT SOLUTION?

Abstract

The current and future exploitation of space is driving scientific and technological developments and offers the opportunity for productive international cooperation among nations and space agencies. The continuous involvement of private companies in space developments intensifies the current debate on the establishment of a legal framework that could provide adequate protection. In fact, the protection of intellectual property rights on discoveries and products linked to these developments will be one of the most important challenges in the exploitation of space.

From the very beginning, outer space has been undeniably recognized as a characteristic unique field that belongs to all humankind and needs to be regulated extraordinarily. In the same vein, space activities require the development of a new generation of patent law, while regulations apply on Earth should serve only as an inspiration. In my presentation I will describe the current protection of intellectual property rights of patents resulting from the exploitation of space. Furthermore, I will explore ways in which current and emerging technological innovations can be employed to secure intellectual property rights. I will focus on Blockchain technology, which offers a transparent and reliable infrastructure for storing patent digital records in a decentralized, secure and encrypted manner. I will argue that Blockchain could lay as a single-window system that provides hierarchical storage of patent data, leaving no space for disputes about inventorship. Furthermore, I will discuss ways to overcome potential vulnerabilities of Blockchain.

Undoubtedly, the interface of patent rights with Blockchain technology in the light of outer space activities creates a *suis generis* legal framework and form a new challenge that spacefarers should take up.