

IISL COLLOQUIUM ON THE LAW OF OUTER SPACE (E7)
Interactive Presentations - IISL COLLOQUIUM ON THE LAW OF OUTER SPACE (IP)

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THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COPUOS LSC WG 5TRE ON REGISTERING SPACE
OBJECTS FORMING PART OF A SATELLITE CONSTELLATION

Abstract

With the adoption of the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space in 1975, the United Nations put in place a publicly accessible register of space objects to assist with their identification and to make responsibility for them transparent. For good reasons, and other than the ITU filings for planned satellites, the UN Space Object Register is reserved to objects that have already been launched. Article II of the Registration Convention prescribes the kind of information that must be provided to the UN. In the case of large satellite constellations, there seems to be a need for additional information. Therefore, in 2023 the Working Group on the Status and Application of the Five United Nations Treaties on Outer Space (WG 5 TRE) at the COPUOS Legal Subcommittee agreed on a set of recommendations concerning the submission of registration information on space objects forming part of a satellite constellation. They are the result of two years of work originating from responses to a set of questions on international space law.

In view of the challenges associated with the registration of space objects that are part of (large) satellite constellations, the working group reaffirmed the importance of achieving the most complete registration of space objects. When submitting registration information on a space object that is part of a satellite constellation, it was recommended that member states take measures to promote the timely availability of information in order to bridge the gap between the submission of registration information to the UN Secretary-General and its distribution by the Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA). The provision of additional information, such as the owner and operator of a constellation, web links and contact details, was also recommended.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the context of the recommendations, their drafting process and elements of the discussion. It also assesses the general principles of space object registration against the background of current technical, legal and political developments related to large satellite constellations. By elaborating the specific characteristics of the UN registration in comparison to ITU filings, possibilities of their further synergies are also discussed.