

## MUCH MORE THAN A SPACE PROGRAMME – GIVE EUROPEAN AMBITION A CHANCE



At ESPI we had the privilege to support the work of the High-Level Advisory Group on Human and Robotic Space Exploration of Europe (HLAG) over the past 7 months, which resulted in the report titled **“Revolution Space”**. We witnessed a very engaged group of leaders from diverse backgrounds, mostly from outside the space and technology sectors, but all united by a clear vision. The group is calling for Europe to embark on a revolutionary space endeavour and for the required visionary political decisions of European leaders. It puts space exploration and space in the wider context of geopolitical, economic and societal benefits, also as a reflection of the reality of our times, as space becomes part of the fabric that shapes the future of our world.

The publication of the report at ESA Council on March 23rd incidentally almost coincided with NASA’s presentation of the Artemis II astronauts as *“humanity’s crew”* on April 3rd. It might as well have coincided with China’s completion of its space station end of 2022, or the announcements related to the construction of commercial space stations in the U.S. It could also be seen as mere paperwork when space powers are already in full action.

While comments on the HLAG report expressed doubts about the readiness of European policy leaders for visionary leadership or were concerned with industrial policy, NASA’s presentation in the presence of Senator Ted Cruz, emphasised the event as a *“message to the world”*, to push boundaries of human achievement and realise opportunities of the space economy. While comments on the HLAG report were introspected, more occupied with European space governance such as the role of ESA vs. EU actors, across the Atlantic talk focused on the DNA of the U.S. as *“frontiers people”*, the *“who we are”* and the Moon as a symbol of a *“can do attitude”*, carrying dreams of students and as inspiration to children. In contrast, European reflex to the HLAG led to an *“either or”* discussion, to a debate on priorities, to preserving the lead in Copernicus, while ignoring how leaders successfully approach space as a set of inseparable elements, from rockets to markets in LEO, on the Moon and beyond. Such a comprehensive strategy of *Space as one* is illustrated across the Atlantic, notably by NASA’s role in SpaceX’s success and the resulting development of Starlink, the commercial LEO game-changer and basis for approx. 80% of SpaceX’s valuation.

None of the above comes as a surprise. Still, it is revealing that so far few were those in Europe who fully embraced the vision offered by the group, as a call and a chance for a European new beginning in a sector shaping the future. Not many showed understanding that the HLAG report indeed is not just about rockets or the Moon, that it is about more than exploration and indeed about more than a space programme. It is about Europe’s place in space and about Europe’s geopolitical influence, future economic gain, societal cohesion and identity. That greater autonomy reinforces Europe’s prospects for meaningful partnerships and freedom of action strengthens European voice in ensuring a more stable multi-polar world. The economic dimension, the significance of transformative action to ensure the prosperity of future generations is more clear than ever, as Europe’s share of global wealth is decreasing. Like the Internet revolution 20 years ago and AI today, space is a transformative force, which will affect all domains of life. Not only through direct impact but notably through too-often overlooked induced and catalytic benefits. The Apollo Programme mobilised talent across the entire U.S. economy, and its global and domestic effects still resonate more than half a century later.

More positive reactions to the Report, certainly provided with best intentions, often too hastily outline technical solutions, like the adaptation of Ariane 6 and underline existing industrial capability. They are not elaborating on *“what is at stake”* for Europe and arguments required to embark to new frontiers. They also fall short of addressing the transformation of the industrial ecosystem and the underlying public-private relations and procurement strategy, a key request voiced by the HLAG. At places, they go as far as to argue that Europe is already engaged as European industry is building parts of U.S. commercial stations. In fact, at the ARTEMIS II event, while European industry was mentioned, ESA and Europe were not. Such industrial perspective may not resonate well with some countries, where the suspected drivers are associated much more with the industrial policy of a few countries than with the true drivers identified by the HLAG in support of a wider European ambition.

Europe deserves a chance to give this ambition a true reflection, including and beyond the perimeters of the space industry and ESA. European political leadership and European citizens need to be better informed about what is at stake for Europe. Only this can prepare a 2023 Space Summit, which can be a demonstration that Europe is fit for the future.

Yours sincerely,



Hermann Ludwig Moeller  
Director of ESPI