

The European Space Policy: Europe's New Compass

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The first European Space Policy adopted at the fourth Space Council held in Brussels on May 22, 2007 is a stepping stone for Europe in space. This collective European Space Policy has a historic and symbolic value as it provides for the first time a European Union dimension to space policy. This policy establishes a comprehensive political framework for the development and exploitation of space technologies and systems and demonstrates Europe's willingness to respond to the challenges of the 21st century. However, it falls short on a series of issues that need to be addressed soon. A comprehensive forward looking roadmap accompanied by a "European Space Pact" validated in the framework of a "European Space Summit" held in the context of an EU Summit should be implemented to act as a catalyst for an ambitious Europe in space.

Europe's Recent Steps towards a Space Policy

Despite the high level of political support devoted to space activities in Europe over the years, an explicit space policy backed by the highest political level possible to provide guidance, but also to confer legitimacy to Europe's involvement in space was long overdue to support space activities, but also allow space to exist in the broader European political agenda.

In recent years, there have been a number of reports, as well as official communications by various European stakeholders leading to the development and the formalization of a pan-European space policy. These include the 1999 European Commission's (EC) working document entitled "Towards a coherent approach for space", the 2003 Green Paper and White Paper on space, the 2003 European Community-ESA Framework Agreement, the Agenda 2007, the Space Councils, the inclusion of "space" as a shared competence of the Union in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, the Communication of the EC "European Space Policy - Preliminary Elements" in May 2005, the inclusion of a budget line in EC's budget for Galileo, as well as the adoption of the EC's Seventh Framework Programme in 2006 with a

dedicated "space" thematic and the ESA Agenda 2011.

Following those peregrinations the first formalized "European Space Policy" was presented on 26 April 2007 as a Communication from the EC to the Council and the Parliament and from the ESA Director General to the ESA Council. It was also accompanied by an EC Staff Working Paper on the "Preliminary elements for a European Space Programme".

The first European Space Policy was long overdue

Drafted in a continuous process of consultation within the High-level Space Policy Group (HSPG)¹, this proposal for a collective space policy is an important milestone for Europe providing for the first time a European Union (EU) dimension to space policy developed and implemented since 30 years by ESA member states collectively or individually. This document establishes a comprehensive political framework for the development and exploitation of space technologies and systems in Europe and outlines the strategic guidelines

¹ The HSPG consists of representatives of key government stakeholders of the EU/ESA, member states, the European Defence Agency (EDA), the EU Satellite Centre and Eumetsat

for its future activities in space, defining priorities and key actions.

The European Space Policy: Mapping Europe's Ambitions in Space

The April 2007 proposal on European Space Policy presents the European vision for space and its related priorities and objectives, including access to space, space technology applications, industrial policy and international relations². The document covers 5 main sections looking at the strategic mission of the European Space Policy, space applications, the foundations aspects of space activities, the competitiveness of the European space industry, as well as governance issues. This document is a proposal for a fully functional European Space Programme³ that will be a common, inclusive and flexible platform encompassing all activities and measures to be developed at national and European level in order to achieve the objectives set in the overall European Space Policy.

The European Space Policy is a Base for Future European Space Activities

While the Communication on the European Space Policy and its associated Space Programme serve as a foundation in the process leading to development of the first European Space Policy, the key element in this process is the Resolution on the European Space Policy adopted unanimously by EU/ESA ministers at the Fourth Space Council on May 22, 2007⁴ that endorses the aforementioned documents.

The Resolution highlights the strategic nature of the space sector contributing to the independence, security and economic

development of Europe and recognizes the actual and potential contributions from space activities to support EU policies such as the Lisbon Strategy, Europe's Sustainable Development Strategy, as well as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) by among others providing vital information on critical global issues such as climate change and humanitarian aid. The Resolution acknowledges also the rank of Europe as a leading space-faring actor and that Europe remains committed to maintain its position via both strengthened intra-European and international cooperation.

Specifically, the Resolution is split in three parts. The first part entitled "Vision for Europe and General Strategy" looks at the overall strategic motives and directions of Europe in space. Most importantly, this Resolution "welcomes and supports" the aforementioned joint EC-ESA document on European Space Policy⁵ and legitimizes therefore the European space policy by being backed up by 29 European governments⁶.

The second part, "Further Steps – Programmes and Implementation" looks at the various thematic areas introduced in the 2007 Communication. However, the order of priorities is somewhat different with access to space, the International Space Station and exploration, governance being given a higher priority in the Resolution. The new policy welcomes also ESA and EU efforts to implement large user-oriented projects such as the flagship initiatives GMES and Galileo with a bigger attention devoted to the former, and calls for ensuring sustainable funding for space applications. The Resolution deals also prominently with security and defence issues, and while recognizing the intrinsic dual nature of space activities it affirms the need to set up a "structured dialogue" with the competent bodies of the member states and within the EU Second and Third Pillars including the European Defence Agency for optimizing synergies between defence and civil space technologies and programmes. Along the same lines the Resolution does not preclude the use of GMES and Galileo by military users and therefore recognizes the implicit dual-use nature of the future services proposed by those

² Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on "European Space Policy" COM(2007) 212 26/4/2007

³ European Staff Working Document "European Space Programme – Preliminary elements" SEC(2007)504 26.04.2007

⁴ The Space Council was created following the Article 8 of the Framework Agreement between the European Community and the ESA that entered into force on 28 May 2004. It consists of a joint and concomitant meeting of the Competitiveness Council of the EU and the Ministerial Council of ESA aiming to provide an overall direction to European space affairs. The Space Council held its first meeting in November 2004 and met twice in 2005 (June and November)

⁵ Council of the European Union "Resolution on the European Space Policy" DS 471/07 16/5/2007

⁶ It also takes note of the European Space Programme

programmes. Issues related to access to space, the International Space Station and exploration, science and technology, governance, industrial policy and international relations are also considered. In overall terms, the Resolution clearly states the strategic importance of space for Europe in demonstrating its independence and its readiness to assume global responsibilities.

Finally, the third part is dedicated to key issues to be looked at when implementing the European Space Policy.

The New European Space Acquis

The political significance of the complex agreement and process on the European Space Policy goes way beyond the arcane details of who opposed or promoted what. The Resolution has a highly symbolic value as it hopes to transform Europe's patchwork of policies into a more harmonized one. Certainly, this Resolution is important because, for the first time, Europe has a fully fledged space policy.

Quite a lot of time and energy have been going into the development of this Resolution and its associated documents. Consequently, in the last years and in the process of developing the European Space Policy an increasing convergence of views between the member states and a growing readiness to cooperate with one another has been observed. It hasn't been easy, but EU and ESA member states have overcome part of their divisions on space policy issues. On the whole, the resolution offers a compromise approach that is balanced and acceptable to all stakeholders. Nonetheless, unavoidably, diverging positions surface with regard to particular aspects of the European Space Policy. Although all these differences will probably not vanish, developments within Europe in the process of the elaboration of this policy have generally been positive, so a degree of optimism is not out of place. The adoption of this first space policy provides therefore an ideal opportunity to highlight the progress which has been made in the last decades which may now be taken for granted, but were never by any means inevitable.

The Outcome of the fourth Space Council is Historic and is a Major Step Forward for Europe in Space

The fourth Space Council is thus a genuine moment of celebration for Europe and its outcome "historic". Whatever the tenor and content of the behind-the-scenes negotiations might be, the collective reaction to the European Space Policy has been largely positive. Many European decision makers have stressed for a long time the importance of space as a strategic element of the toolbox needed to equip Europe for global competition, and this first space policy provides now some potential means for injecting a new dynamic to the European space sector. The Resolution on the European Space Policy, as well as the Communication on the European Space Policy and the preliminary elements of the European Space Programme can therefore be regarded as the bedrock on which the future European ventures will rest on. And, what is unquestionable is that, after a very difficult period following the French and Dutch "No" votes to the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and the difficult discussions of the Financial Perspectives for 2007-13, the outcome of this process is a significant achievement for Europe in space. The storm clouds which gathered appear to be slowly drifting.

What Pieces are still missing to this Puzzle?

Now that the strategic importance of space for Europe is clear, it is crucial that EU, ESA and their respective member states federate their efforts and pull together to safeguard their shared space interests. However, the newly adopted policy rests on clay feet, as the emerging "policy mix of actions" will be implemented according to each partner's capacity and because the European Space Programme is a non-binding collection of activities. Furthermore, while the EC and ESA have correctly pointed out the major challenges facing Europe, there remain a number of unanswered questions most crucially of all, the relationship between short-term plans and budget realities, and long-term reform efforts. Further discussions and negotiations are undoubtedly necessary as the Resolution and its associated documents do not go far enough in a number of ways. The European Space Policy should not be an empty promise; ESPI views ergo that the following elements should be considered in greater details, the earlier the better.

- Addressing defence space-related issues in more depth, in particular the explicit cooperation among all the concerned stakeholders;
- Tackling the governance issues and particularly the long-term relations between the EC and ESA;
- Introducing rules for increased flexibility in funding projects and programmes, as there is a definite need for improved fluidity within the EU/ESA mechanisms of funding;
- Ensuring that the space policy is taken into account in the next Financial Perspectives by EU member states;
- Prioritizing space programmes and activities;
- Devise a clear and robust European exploration strategy;
- Setting clear priorities for international cooperation with third parties.

ESPI advocates for the Development of an Ambitious Roadmap and adopt a “European Space Pact” during an EU Summit

The key is how this is going to be done. Declaring that promoting Europe in space is important is little more than a statement of the obvious. However, the problem is not a lack of will of the EC and ESA or the member states. Nor it is a lack of the elements for a coherent policy. Rather, it is the lack of shared understanding of the urgency of the issues among member states. Since “space” is not (yet) a shared competence of the Union, the development of European Space Policy is still left to European member states individually and collectively, in coordination with ESA and the Commission. Therefore member states have to be steering the process. However, they have been slow to match their words with deeds. The time has come for them to shoulder their responsibilities. Vague expressions of interest will not be enough: they need to agree now on key targets and spell out in detail how they intend to meet them. This means, first and foremost, to reverse the reemerging trends of re-nationalisation of European space activities witnessed in recent months. Interdependence in space activities and programmes is needed to ensure the adhesion of all stakeholders behind a truly European project and a coherent forward-looking agenda.

A potential solution is to start to work with all European member states on an ambitious roadmap of European space activities under the framework of the next EU Presidency “triplets” under the lead of the Portuguese, Slovenian and French governments to benefit from the new momentum given to space affairs in Europe and to continue the development of a comprehensive European Space Programme. The development of a roadmap would allow fostering a dialogue among all key institutional decision-makers and stakeholders to develop a forward looking strategy for Europe in space and propose and define new programmes for the whole Europe. This roadmap should then be validated during a groundbreaking “European Space Summit” that would include all EU and ESA Heads of States and governments to go beyond the current structure represented by the Space Council where only Ministers gather. This “European Space Summit” should therefore be put on the agenda of an EU Summit under French Presidency in fall 2008 to give space affairs a high political visibility in Europe, to implement the newly adopted European space policy, and most importantly to set up a “European Space Pact” validating the roadmap on future European space activities to enter into force at the beginning of the next decade. Such an event would also legitimize *de facto* the competence of the EU on space affairs. If European leaders can agree to support and implement such a strategy then it could herald a bright future for Europe in space in a global context.

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Through its activities, ESPI contributes to facilitating the decision-making process, increasing awareness on space technologies and applications with the user communities, opinion leaders and the public at large, and supporting students and researchers in their space-related work.

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