

EUISS EVENT REPORT

Advancing the EU's Strategic Positioning in Outer Space: Capability Development and Partnerships following the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence

Jointly organised by the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU and the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)

INTRODUCTION

On 25 April 2023, the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) together with the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU welcomed a select group of some 80 experts from the EU institutions, Member States' governments, industry and the research and think-tank communities to a timely seminar entitled '**Advancing the EU's Strategic Positioning in Outer Space: Capability Development and Partnerships following the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence**'. Composed of three panel discussions, this expert seminar aimed to assess the implications of the EU's recently launched Space Strategy for Security and Defence for Member States, capability development and industry, as well as for key strategic partners. How does the threat environment EU space assets are surrounded by in outer space really look like? What were the resulting main drivers for the new strategy? What are the strategy's main components and objectives, and does its launch mark a real breakthrough? How should or could Member States, industry, and key strategic partners ideally react to the strategy? These were just a few of the central guiding questions the invited experts pondered over during the seminar.

Underlining both the timeliness of these questions as well as the importance the Swedish Council Presidency and the Swedish Government attribute to the EU's positioning in outer space, **opening keynote remarks were provided by the Swedish Minister of Defence Dr Pål Jonson**. The Minister emphasised the indispensability of the new space strategy for any efficient future EU action in outer space. He described how the Russian war in Ukraine even more dramatically than previous crises highlighted the critical role of space assets in modern warfare as well as the challenges resulting from the influence of private companies, deficient production capacities and innovation power in Europe and around the world. Accordingly, there can be no question that the EU has to make its space sector more resilient and therefore, build strong partnerships, not least with NATO as manifested in the third EU-NATO Joint Declaration from January 2023. Minister Jonson concluded by describing how Sweden aims to define, advance and better secure its role and capabilities in space, which will also include the development of a Swedish space strategy for security and defence.

MAIN TAKE-AWAYS

Following Minister Jonson's keynote remarks, the seminar evolved across three panel discussions, each one highlighting different considerations implied in the drafting and implementation of the new EU Strategy for Security and Defence.

Panel Discussion I – Setting the Scene: Threats, Strategies & EU Action

The first panel discussion aimed at presenting the audience with a **comprehensive assessment of the key threats the EU is exposed to in outer space**, and based on that, **reiterate the driving factors that incentivised the drafting of the strategy**. For this, the panel brought together Major General Michael Traut, Commander of the German Space Command, and two of the strategy's main penholders, Patrick Chatard-Moulin, Deputy Head of the European External Action Service's Space Division, and Guillaume de la Brosse, Head of Unit at the European Commission's Directorate General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) and was moderated by Dr Eva Bernhardsdotter, Desk Officer for Space and Defence R&D at the Swedish Defence Ministry.

Three central messages could be derived from the discussion:

1. **Space is a strategic global operational domain**, which has been subject to constant competition ever since the first space programmes were launched. There is hardly any space asset that cannot be used for military purposes, i.e., that is not of dual use. Accordingly, more and more nations around the world are and will be establishing space commands going forward. Hence, EU Member States and eventually the Union as a whole need to (1) protect and defend its space-based services, (2) ensure access to armed forces, (3) improve space domain awareness, which includes the identification of other space actors' intentions, (4) jointly conduct effective space operations, and (5) build the necessary capabilities.
2. The drafting of the new EU space strategy has thus marked a **"real change of paradigms"**. After years of a mainly commercially driven approach to space assets, the strategy substantiates the EU's and Member States' recognition of outer space as the strategic domain of constant competition it has become. It hence aims to (1) increase the resilience of the EU's space assets, including by encouraging Member States to share intelligence and protect industrial value chains, (2) establish appropriate threat response mechanisms, (3) strengthen the EU's strategic partnerships – especially with NATO –, while also suggesting seeking dialogue with non-likeminded countries and adversaries, and (4) prepare the EU's space programmes for the future by fostering competitiveness, skills, and innovation.
3. Space is a global common, meaning that **there cannot be any one nation that can ensure a peaceful and sustainable use of this domain going forward by itself**. Hence, while the pure drafting and launch of the strategy has not involved much engagement or reactions from countries outside Europe, strategic partners like the United States have made clear that they are interested in cooperating with the EU, as well as with NATO, the UN, and industry.

Panel Discussion II – Capability Development & Industry

The second panel discussion focused on the **implications of the new EU space strategy on capability development and associated industry in Europe**. Chaired by Dr Jan Joel Andersson, Senior Analyst for Security and Defence at the EUISS, the panel brought together Colonel Jaime Sánchez Mayorga, Liaison Officer of the Spanish Defence Ministry currently posted at the French Defence Ministry, Alessandro Cignoni, Head of Unit for Information Superiority at the EDA, Guillaume Galtier, Policy Officer at the European Commission's DG DEFIS, and Brice Lançon, Vice President for Space Security Defence at Safran Group and Member of the Defence Business Unit of the Aerospace, Security and Defence Industries Association (ASD).

From the discussion, three main take-aways could be derived:

1. Consistent with the previous panel, the discussion underlined the new space strategy, and particularly its recognition of space as part of the critical infrastructure, mark a turning point, a step for the EU towards becoming a space power and thus a real power on the international stage. Acknowledging that **everything in space has a defence dimension**, Member States, and industry, are well-aware of the need to expand space capability development.
2. While Member States had clearly not waited for the strategy or any preceding mechanisms to cooperate on space capability development, the panellists confirmed that a wide variety of financial incentives, such as the European Defence Fund, platforms for consultations, such as the European Defence Agency, and actual projects were now in place to facilitate this cooperation. In this context, the panellists also remarked that **space and defence are policy-driven** and not market-driven, and that hence expecting market-based solutions to generate the timely production and delivery of needed capabilities would be naïve. It was also argued by some that industry should be further involved in defining these policy-driven solutions, while EU investments overall need to become more credible and long-term.
3. Yet, continuous work needs to be done to **break long-established silos** between the various stakeholders involved in space capability building. Key challenges remain in **making Member States agree on sets of common requirements and reconciling their respective national capabilities and demands**. For this, it was proposed to use the new EU space strategy to draft concrete capability developing plans, which would also provide greater incentives for industry to advance innovation. As one panellist remarked, "in defence, you cannot bet, you need to be sure".

Panel Discussion III – Partnerships on Space, Security & Defence

The last panel discussion aimed to shed light on **what the new EU space strategy will or could imply for the Union's strategic partnerships** with third countries and other multilateral organisations like NATO and the UN. The panel, chaired by EUISS Director Dr Gustav Lindstrom, was composed of Alexandre Monéger, Head of NATO's Defence Policy Section, Roxana-Valentina Banu, Policy Officer at the European External Action Service's Space Division, Dr Eva Bernhardsdotter, Desk Officer for Space and Defence R&D at the Swedish Defence Ministry, and James Black, Assistant Director of the Defence and Security Research Group at RAND Europe.

The three main messages were:

1. A key challenge to the EU's overarching goal of preventing a further weaponization of space is that **not every country recognises this strategic domain as a global common**. Yet, the growing number of actors, growing variety of risks, and the resulting wicked problem of regulating activities in outer space require global solutions.
2. Hence, there is an **imperative for the EU to build new and strengthen existing partnerships**. Its interactions with other countries as well as actors in the private sector, for instance, can, however, evolve **along a spectrum** from deterrence to dialogue to confidence- and trust building measures to actual close strategic partnerships. NATO, the United States, and Japan constitute obvious major partners, with whom structured dialogues have already been conducted or are planned, but also the UK and Japan should be considered for this latter end of the spectrum. Meanwhile, countries that likely fall on the other end of the spectrum, i.e., whose activities in space rather call for deterring measures should not be lost out of sight. The panellists remarked that even with non-likeminded partners, channels for dialogue should be kept open.
3. In contrast to the United States – one of the Cold War space hegemons –, the **EU has great potential to leverage its normative power**, and thus reach all those smaller 'middle nations' who refuse to pick a side, i.e., to conform either exclusively with 'the West' or powers like Russia and China. In line with its ongoing efforts in the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats, the EU needs to continue (1) raising awareness, (2) increasing space literacy inside and outside Europe, while (3) always putting itself into the shoes of other nations and actors and (4) tailoring the incentives it can provide for enhanced cooperation accordingly. As one panellist emphasised, "we need to act now, and we need to act quickly".