

The European Union Space Strategy: A Science Diplomacy Perspective

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EU science diplomacy is gaining importance day by day although being a rather new concept. “In today’s global and multipolar international system, different diplomatic methods are practiced besides the traditional diplomatic methods. Science Diplomacy, which is based on knowledge-based international scientific and technological cooperation, emerges as an important foreign policy tool”ⁱ in this sense. It has three main components, which are namely “science in diplomacy”, “diplomacy for science” and “science for diplomacy”.

Countries as well as international organizations are aware of the fact that it is no longer possible to be a global actor or a big power without making international collaborations in the field of science and technology, which is the “diplomacy for science” dimension of the science diplomacy.

The European Union is no exception. Especially when it comes to its space activities which are pertinent to the Internal Market Priority in the European Commission’s 2017 Work Program. This would also reinforce the EU’s role as a global actor. As stated by the High Representative Federica Mogherini, the “EU can be and should be a space power” and there is a need for global governance of space activities.ⁱⁱ

Space is crucial for many policy areas such as tackling climate change, smart transport systems, energy safety and telecommunications.ⁱⁱⁱ EU Science Commissioner Carlos Moedas has affirmed this cross-cutting nature of space policy, stating that “(t)he Commission is devoting extra attention to strategic partnerships because many of Europe’s challenges are linked to those of the entire international community, such as climate change, migration, and energy security”^{iv}

In this context, Moedas pointed out that “scientific cooperation has an indisputable role in effective European neighborhood policy, international relations,

and development policy. Therefore [...] I want to see the EU play an increasingly active and visible role in international science diplomacy”^v. This approach corresponds with the EU’s global player role that the Juncker Commission intends to build. Europe should “be big on the big things”^{vi}.

The space related science diplomacy activities of the EU can be dated back to the establishment of the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) in 1954 and then the establishment of the European Space Research Organisation in 1962, followed by the European Space Agency (ESA).

Today the European Space Policy is worth a 52 billion euro to the EU economy. It is conducted by programs such as Horizon 2020, Copernicus, Galileo and Egnos.^{vii} The EU has acquired a shared competence with the Lisbon Treaty in the area of space and has made extensive use of it.^{viii} The new generation of geo-localization has recently begun with the Galileo program, which is an European alternative to the American GPS system and Copernicus, which is a leading provider of Earth observation data around Globe.^{ix} Copernicus is the world’s 4th biggest producer of raw data. As part of a recent initiative, the EU Commission has launched “A Space Strategy for Europe” on the 26th of October 2016, planning to invest 12 billion euro in the above-mentioned space programs between 2014-2020.

The European Space Strategy addresses the following areas:^x

1. Implementation and market uptake of Copernicus and Galileo
2. New market opportunities for space-based applications and services
3. Governance of European Space Policy
4. Other areas of action

The four main aims of the European Space Strategy

could be summarized as follows:^{xi}

1. Giving more monetary value and legislative emphasis to space infrastructure
2. Encouraging private investment
3. Space access for EU economy, industry (e.g. defense and security)
4. Space, diplomacy and industry: to give a major international role to Europe in this area

Even though it is argued that the “EU Space Strategy will bring benefits to all”, Europe’s space industry faces risks and global competition due to the strategic character of space, especially compared to the US space industry. So there was a need for a renewed and comprehensive EU approach. With this strategy, the EU wants to go “far and beyond”.^{xii}

The competitiveness of the European space industry is challenged at the international level. So it is a timely policy. The “Space strategy must ensure European non-dependence in the field of space key-enabling and critical technologies”.^{xiii} The EU space policy is a scalable tool which is supposed to serve EU jobs, growth, investment and competitiveness. This is why space diplomacy also has an economic component. There are certain criticisms raised to this strategy insofar as the EU space strategy leaves exploring to the European Space Agency (ESA).^{xiv} The ESA should be more flexible in terms of participation of its members since “the [EU Commission] wants on the one hand to strengthen cooperation with the EU member states and on the other hand to consider new rules for cooperation with the European Space Agency”. The Commission also wants to set up its own space program. According to the Article 189, the Lisbon Treaty “confers on the Union a shared space competence”^{xv} as stated above meaning that the supranational authority aims at coordinating the EU space programs and avoid a fragmentation in this respect.

To sum up, by boosting its current diplomacy activities in the field of science, the EU Space Strategy is an important step towards the Union’s ambition for being a global actor. For this to happen, a strengthened European space industry operating under harmonized legislation within the Internal Market is a crucial precondition. However since last year, there has not been significant progress about this Strategy and it

needs to be further developed. The Commission should perhaps take into account more of the current criticisms.

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