Strategic Compass and EU space-based defence capabilities

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Arnaud DANJEAN (EPP, FR) on the strategic compass and EU space-based defence capabilities.

As a reminder, the EU adopted, on 10 March 2023, its first ever EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence. The Strategy, which is part of the implementation of the EU Strategic Compass that identifies space as a strategic domain, offers an ambitious framework to protect the EU space assets, defend its interests, deter hostile activities in space and strengthen its strategic posture and autonomy.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated the essential need for and strategic value of geospatial imagery and secure connectivity in military targeting, manoeuvring and defence, but has also revealed challenges that need to be addressed by international governance initiatives focused on space and cyber issues, given the close links existing between the space and cyber domains.

The report focuses on five priority areas:

Protection and resilience of systems

Noting the upsurge in risks from **space debris**, as well as threats in space and on space systems, Members consider it necessary to bolster the resilience of European space infrastructure, supply chain systems and services.

Members highlighted the need to establish an effective regulatory framework for new space companies based in the EU, with a significant emphasis on protective measures and information security. The Commission is encouraged to include matters of registration, liability and environmental standards in new space legislation.

The committee called for the international regulatory and capacity resources for space traffic management (STM) to be boosted and for the establishment of common reaction thresholds for acts occurring in space, with the aim of better protecting the infrastructure in orbit belonging to the EU, the Member States and private companies.

Stressing that the EU should not rely on third-party space surveillance systems, the EU and its Member States are called on to strengthen their efforts in the field of space surveillance and the tracking of objects in an effort to reduce the risk of collision.

Response to threats

Members highlighted that the EU and its Member States must bolster their capabilities and governance to detect, categorise, attribute and address threats as quickly as possible. Space domain awareness (SDA) is essential to detecting, tracking and attributing a threat and enabling Member States to take appropriate decisions in the event of a space attack.

The report called for more meaningful responses on solidarity mechanisms to be taken at EU level. Members welcomed, in this regard, the commitment to develop a dedicated toolbox, complementary to cyber diplomacy and hybrid toolboxes, that would help to address the different threats in the space domain.

The EU and its Member States should adopt policies on **anti-satellite testing**, specifically with the aim of banning destructive testing.

Competitiveness and investment

The EU is called on to adopt a genuine industrial policy and to be able to draw upon a competitive industry. The report stated that EU support to enable Member States to develop their capabilities must benefit European industrial players, both long-established groups and innovative SMEs and start-ups.

In addition, Members stressed that, if space capabilities are to be developed, the resources allocated to space in the next multiannual financial framework must be substantially increased, including in support of EU agencies such as the EU Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA), the EU Satellite Centre (SatCen) and the European Defence Agency.

Governance

The report stressed that EU and Member State resilience and their response to potential hostile actions in space, particularly malicious acts threatening EU space assets such as the testing of anti-satellite weapons, must be underpinned by clear, flexible and responsive governance, thereby addressing shortcomings stemming from the current fragmentation of competences in the EU's approach to space and defence and enhancing accountability for all actors involved in the different components of the EU Space Programme.

Members pointed out that governance must not duplicate existing means or circumvent Member States in areas such as threat attribution, which largely relies on national capabilities.

Cooperation

The EU is called on to assume a more active role as a facilitator in international norm-building in space. The report stressed the need to develop, at UN level, an effective framework for the coordination of space situational awareness and to develop norms and principles for space debris removal. Moreover, the EU and its Member States should reaffirm commitments to transparency and confidence building measures to advance new measures for space security in the light of current threats. In this regard, Members noted the need for an international legal framework regulating the activities of new space companies.

Lastly, Members support the continuation of an enhanced dialogue with the United States but call for deeper cooperation and for alliances to be established with a broader set of EU strategic partners.