European space policy: place and strategy of the Community

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PURPOSE : to establish a coherent approach for space in Europe. CONTENT : in 1999, European Ministers called on the European Commission and the Executive of the European Space Agency to elaborate a coherent European Strategy for Space. The European Parliament welcomed this initiative, emphasising the importance of introducing for the first time a Community dimension in Europe's political approach to space. The EU Council and the ESA Council at Ministerial level thereby provided a basis for a joint consultation of all interested parties concerned and enabled the preparation of a comprehesive document on a strategy for space that can be subscribed to by European states, irrespective of whether they are member of ESA or part of the Union. Space based information is going to be a significant element for success in the knowledge economy of tomorrow. In the public sector, at the level of the Union, it is likely to play an increasing role in the implementation of a wide range of EU policies such as for the environment, transport, telecommunications, culture, research, agriculture fishery, regional development and international relations. Furthermore, space presents a security dimension, which has thus far only been dealt with, at European level, in the context of the WEU. The forthcoming integration of the WEU into the EU and the new steps taken at the European Summit in Helsinki towards the developent of a Common European Security and Defence Policy (CESDP) are prompting the European Union to take space capabilities into account. Against this background and together with ESA, the Commission has mapped out a comprehensive document on a European Strategy for Space. This Communication presents this joint document on the strategy, which is built around three objectives: 1) strengthening the foundation for space activities: preserving independent and affordable access to space, and ensuring a broad technology base with the industrial capability for designing, manufacturing and operating satellite systems and the associated ground infrastructure; 2) enhancing scientific knowledge for a better understanding of our planet and its atmosphere, the solar system and the Universe; 3) reaping the benefits for markets and society through a demand-driven exploitation of the technical capabilities of the space community. This requires the involvement of end-users from the planning phase until operational deployment in a constructive dialogue between all parties concerned from the public and private sector, at the national and at the European level. The strategy is not intended to as a detailed road map for programming space activities in the coming years. It should rather provide a strong political support for public and private actors in the field of space and a reference for their individual and co-operative efforts for building a coherent and effective space infrastructure with the associated services. It should also constitute a basis for consulting and mobilising society at large on the benefits that can be derived from space-based information and knowledge. In conclusion, the strategy's success will depend on itsendorsement by all actors in Europe and on their commitment, in particular that of the Member States, to implement it and develop it further.