European space policy: medium and long-term future use of space. Green Paper

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Guido BODRATO (EPP-ED, I) in response to the Commission's Green Paper on European space policy. Among the findings in its extensive report, the committee regretted the growing gap between the public budgets allocated to space policy in the US and in Europe in both civil and military spheres. Furthermore, it was concerned that many strategic technologies in the space industry are being developed or exist solely in the USA, and that dependence on these American technologies is increasing. MEPs wanted the Commission to look, together with the industry, at appropriate measures to respond to this problem. They reaffirmed the need for Europe to play a leading role on the international stage and to be able to gain access to space through its own efforts. At the same time, however, the committee also drew attention to the importance of international cooperation, especially as regards research, assistance to orbiting space vehicles and interplanetary flights, and wanted to see a reactivation of the activities and projects under the umbrella of the International Space Station. MEPs also felt that particular encouragement should be given to efforts to find out about and explore Mars, "the planet that is closest to Earth and is also the most appealing". The committee welcomed the recent framework agreement, signed on 1 September 2003, between the European Community and the European Space Agency (ESA) as it constituted a major step towards cooperation, which should minimise duplication of effort. Moreover, MEPs welcomed the fact that Article 150 of the draft Treaty drawn up by the Convention on the future of Europe assigns a specific role to the Union in space policy, and they urged the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference to take up this proposal as it stands. MEPs supported the agreement reached on the Galileo satellite navigation programme but drew the Commission's attention to the strict time frame laid down. The committee stressed the need for industry to develop specific services for the use of the Galileo programme in order to fulfil its joint responsibility for the success of the project. As to the GMES initiative (designed to establish a European capacity for the provision and use of operational information for Global Monitoring of Environment and Security), the report urged the Commission to speed up its implementation particularly in view of the growing international interest. Lastly, it reiterated the proposal it had repeatedly put forward for a European Space Conference to be convened in 2005 to explore the ways in which Europe can operate in the space sector.