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The Ambitions of Europe in Space

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by welcoming you all to this groundbreaking conference.

Europe now faces some fundamental challenges. Fighting the economic crisis; ensuring the well being of our citizens; tackling climate change; finding ways to unleash our full potential for innovation and job creation, and to bring about a true knowledge society. We also need to reinforce our position in the world scene. All these challenges need the support of enabling tools: and space applications is one of them.

Our citizens' well-being depends increasingly on space-based applications in areas such as environment, security and transport. As demographics change, we will have to turn increasingly to space applications to develop social, medical and mobility services.

Climate change affects the quality of citizens' lives and has enormous economic implications. Space-based Earth observation has substantially contributed to understanding the full scale of climate change, and without space applications we will not be able to tackle it and anticipate its consequences.

Space-based applications are increasingly important to many other EU policy areas as well, such as agriculture, environment and health.

And space activities also play a useful role in invigorating European competitiveness and economic growth. The reason is simple. Space both requires and generates new technologies, knowledge intensive services, new products and new forms of cooperation. All this stimulates innovation and creates new jobs beyond the space industry.

Space can certainly contribute to economic recovery in the short term and to robust industrial development in the medium and long term.

Space is also essential to project the image of the EU as a world player.

And without space research, our knowledge society will simply not come about.

If I have underlined all these aspects it's because sometimes politically we speak about space, people believe that we are speaking about some priority very distant in the future. And I think it is a very important task for all of us that our political and decision making responsibility to underline that when we are speaking about space policy, we are not simply talking about a symbolic, a great project for the future, it is about very concrete applications for the life of our citizens and I think that this is important if we want to keep the political support for this policy.

What has the EU done so far?

Well, the European Space Agency and several EU Member States have an outstanding record of achievements, such as the Ariane launchers or the Columbus laboratory of the International Space Station.

The EU has also taken the lead in two projects of fundamental importance for our future: Galileo and Global Monitoring for Environment and Security.

Galileo will contribute to the safety, efficiency and comfort of private and commercial transport. It will also help us to develop social services for disabled or elderly people or, in the agricultural sector, to enhance farming and livestock management, just to name a few examples.

Our project Global Monitoring for Environment and Security, or GMES, will allow us to monitor phenomena such as floods and fires, helping us improve emergency response services and citizens' safety. It can also gather data on our land and monitor the conditions and composition of the atmosphere or the ocean, which is essential to understand climate change.

The EU is devoting an average of €700 million per year to support space projects over the period 2007-2013.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since 2007 - following a Commission Communication which, for the first time, outlined the elements of a European space policy - the Council has put space firmly on the political agenda. Four priority areas were identified: climate change, security, innovation and exploration.

The European Parliament has endorsed the European Space Policy and asked the Council and the Commission to make concrete proposals on these four priority areas.

And the Lisbon Treaty now unambiguously enshrines space as a shared responsibility for the EU and its Member States.

So let me ask the obvious follow-up question: does the EU have the ambition to lead in space, or do we leave the leading role to others?

A lot depends on where we go from here. So let me share my views with you today.

First, we must guarantee the success of our flagship projects Galileo and GMES. Galileo implementation is well on course and GMES is now making a critical transition from research to an operational stage. Both represent long-term commitments for the EU.

We must ensure that long-term funding or governance issues do not get in the way of their success. At stake is not just potential economic returns that run into billions of euro, but also our credibility.

Second, we must develop a strong, space-based capacity to deal with climate change. Such capacity will build on GMES and Galileo applications. But we must make adequate use of all space resources available, including those in Member States and bodies like the European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (EUMETSAT) and the European Space Agency (ESA).

We must also set up international partnerships. Our objective should be to have at our disposal the necessary space-based instruments, applications, and robust coordination mechanisms to tackle climate change.

Third, we need more security in space and from space. Our space assets and infrastructure are indispensable for our economy and security and we need to protect them. The EU should develop an independent capacity to monitor satellites and debris orbiting the Earth and the space environment, and tackle possible hazards.

We should also exploit the potential of space infrastructure (already available, for example, through GMES) to protect our citizens and our ground infrastructure against natural and man-made hazards and to be at the service of European Security and Defence Policy goals. These capacities should be developed in partnership with Member States.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We need to ask ourselves what role we want the EU to play in space exploration over the next two to three decades. Space exploration is essential to expand human knowledge and to stimulate innovation. By better understanding space and the evolution of other planets we will better understand our own environment.

Human space exploration of the solar system, including Mars and possibly the return of humans to the moon, could be the backbone of such a space exploration strategy.

The 1st EU-ESA international conference on human space exploration, which will take place in Prague on 23 October and is organized by the Commission and the ESA, will bring together representatives of all EU and ESA Member States, as well as our international partners.

The Commission and, I hope, the ESA will argue that space exploration is important to the EU, and that we want to launch discussions about the role of the EU in this international endeavour.

From the Commission viewpoint, important issues will have to be addressed, including:

- how to assure independent access to space;
- the issue of independent human spaceflight capability, in the context of an international partnership; and
- finally, how to support the International Space Station.

We also must reinforce support for bottom-up space research, which is the breeding ground for a growing knowledge society and is indispensable for us to reap the full benefits of space.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Space represents a fantastic political and economic challenge for the EU.

The Commission and the Council have identified the priority areas for EU involvement in space. As the European Parliament has reminded us, we now need to translate those priorities into a consistent strategy.

In the political guidelines I presented to the European Parliament for my reelection for a second term I have mentioned explicitly: space is one of the areas I want to see in the future as progressing at EU level and I believe that with the vote on my nomination, the Parliament has endorsed that as well.

So the question is: will we be up to that challenge?

For the sake of those whose future we build today, I trust we will.

And I hope that we will reinforce and I am sure that you will reinforce a real European space strategy.

Thank you.