

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Defence | Space | Cybersecurity

The Upcoming Challenges for the European Industry

Opening remarks

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12 September, 09:45, ESRIN, Frascati, Italy

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- Dear Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani, Minister Adolfo Urso, Commissioner Andrius Kubilius, ladies and gentlemen, good morning and welcome to our Frascati centre.
- It is an immense pleasure and privilege to host you here at ESA ESRIN, a place where I have worked for 15 years, in my last function as Director for EO and Head of ESRIN. This function is filled today by Simonetta, with great success.
- It is a special pleasure to address such an influential and distinguished audience.
- Many of you know me well: I am a man of candour, but especially of action. I have committed myself to the inspiring space endeavour during my whole career for one reason: to serve Europe.
- Because I have always considered space infrastructures as a tool, and thus an opportunity for positive, constructive progress. A tool

for uplifting humankind; a tool to better understand and protect the Earth; a tool to boost our economies; a tool for political leaders to shape and build our European identity of values. Copernicus is a very good example, which was developed with thousands of colleagues across Europe, for the benefit of all Europe.

- Today, let us be audacious and not shy away from what has been a discreet albeit clear driving force for space efforts, of its technology breakthroughs, of pushing the boundaries of collective will: our security and defence.
- And why do I say “discreet”? Because Europe has been shy in coming to terms with the legitimate role cooperative space plays in our security, and in our geostrategic independence.
- And it is now fact: Europe’s space and defence autonomy has become one of our Continent’s foremost priorities, as we have just heard clearly from Commissioner Kubilius.
- Europe has long chosen its own, cooperative, excellence-driven path, concentrating its efforts in areas such as science, critical applications, and safety.
- Through this soft power, Europe has been a beacon of light, hope and progress in the eyes of the entire world. We can only be proud of this achievement.
- Meanwhile, the space policies and programmes of many of our international partners have to a substantial degree been driven by another priority: defence.

- The U.S. GPS is a military application made available to civilian users and international partners; whereas Galileo was conceived, you may recall, as a civil programme under civilian control, making the subsequent, critical use of Galileo by defence communities a complex process, in which a civilian approach had to adapt to unfamiliar security constituencies and more stringent military requirements.
- Today, the US is set to invest 175 billion dollars in its Golden Dome in record time and China has already demonstrated the use of defence-ready technologies in space years ahead of what Europe can currently accomplish.
- So let's be clear: while some of Europe's countries with a defense space infrastructure each operate roughly 10 military satellites, China and the US count them in the hundreds, and soon in the thousands.
- Every five minutes, a Chinese satellite flies overhead: that makes almost 3 flybys by the time I will conclude my introductory statement. This means that Europe is not just trailing behind; it actually means we're not playing the same game at all. At least not yet.
- And we are realising this just as immense threats loom at our border: Ukraine, whose future security is Europe's most fundamental strategic priority, still relies on American space data, not European.
- Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in her State of the Union address two days ago, I quote "We must invest in real-time space surveillance so that no movement of forces goes unseen."

- How timely, given the intrusion of Russian drones over Polish sovereign territory just a few days ago.
- The Commission President, and Europe, are lucky that ESA is already working on exactly that, to establish a real-time space surveillance system, together with our Member States and the European Commission.
- ESA is the tool of its Member States, and ESA offers an opportunity to support key security entities such as the EU, including its EU Satellite Center in Torrejon, but also NATO, the European Defence Agency, OCCAR, to name but a few.
- The Agency is your tool as Europe's architect and developer of complex space systems, offering unchallenged expertise. There is no other organisation in Europe that better combines technical excellence with hands-on project management skills. The Agency's workforce of over 6000 is doing this every day, since 50 years, as we celebrate our 50th anniversary of the creation of ESA this year.
- And I don't believe we have the luxury today of turning our backs on cooperation, or worse, deepening fragmentation, one of Europe's unfortunate flaws expressed so clearly by Mr Draghi last year.
- In Commissioner Kubilius' own words: "Europe is preparing for war". Now the urgency of the threat we face requires that we work with the tools we already have at our disposal: in this respect, I am convinced that ESA provides the opportunity for Member States to implement their security requirements, including in defence.

- Of course, ESA will never replace national efforts or sovereign capabilities: ESA can be entrusted with the security capability segments that can be shared, in a pooling & sharing approach, where each owner retains full control of his or her systems but benefits from others who can offer excess capacity, and vice-versa. It will be more efficient if systems are federated and it will bring operational added value to national defence communities.
- In addition, ESA, with the EU, will add capacity and provide its contribution in the pooling & sharing philosophy, to significantly enhance observation frequency and add new technologies. But also, ESA's role should be to create the system architecture, so that all contributions can seamlessly interact while respecting the highest security requirements.
- And while we're still discussing what I regard as an inevitable evolution – not a revolution – in European space activities, defence capabilities are already building up in space, far from the public's eye.
- I have met frequently with General Philippe Adam, the French Space Command until a few weeks ago, and he has long been adamant that the first battleground in any modern conflict will now be space.
- Not air, not sea, but space.
- And why is this? Because no modern strategic planning or military system can do without the key data gathered or relayed from space.

- And we're not talking about science fiction. Events that used to be largely classified are now openly available, precisely to raise awareness, to prepare citizens for a new era of security, for new threats and new collective efforts.
- *Need I recall* the previous French Defence Minister Florence Parly's warning when she disclosed the hostile eavesdropping of the Franco-Italian secure satellite Athena Fidus by Russia's Luch Olymp in 2017? This was a space policy game-changer that required political courage. It started changing mindsets.
- *Need I recall* that in November 2021, just 4 months prior to its invasion of Ukraine, Russia proceeded with an ASAT test, destroying one of its satellites, unnecessarily creating thousands of fragments of space debris? What was the point except intimidation, a smoking gun signalling an imminent invasion?
- *Need I recall* the Russian cyber-attack on Viasat, the U.S. satcom infrastructure used by Ukrainian forces, as the first offensive wave of the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, 2022, even before a single missile had been launched? A cyber-attack aimed at ground segments that hampered Ukrainian defence responses and sent critical ripples all the way to German energy infrastructure.
- *Need I recall* that GPS jamming and spoofing has since been used on a permanent basis over and around Ukraine as a hybrid warfare strategy towards neighbouring EU countries. It's well documented over Finland, Poland, Lithuania, or Bulgaria, where airplanes suddenly lose Position, Navigation and Timing signals. Thankfully,

Galileo's secure PRS will be available by the end of the year, a service designed to protect against interference and spoofing.

- We must up our game in space and defence. This is undisputed. But it also requires bold political decisions.
- This is the message that Commissioner Kubilius and I have been relentlessly explaining to our Member States.
- ESA is not a security actor, but it is unquestionably a security provider. There is a fine line in this distinction.
- ESA will never operate intelligence satellites, but it can provide the space infrastructure to a designated operator. As we already do in Galileo.
- And let me be very clear: my goal is to make sure that ESA is the right body to support the Union's and Member States' security and defence interests in space and from space. We have proved so by building Galileo and delivering its secure PRS signal; by building Italy's outstanding dual-use IRIDE programme; with the development of independent access to space; with the game-changing cyber defence capabilities being built as we speak in our European Security and Education Centre, in Belgium, to name but a few.
- And my task now is not only to safeguard and protect Europe's critical assets, but to anticipate its needs of tomorrow.
- With Commissioner Kubilius, we have thus agreed on a coordinated effort to build a European space resilience from space 'system of systems', composed of three pillars: Earth Observation, in support

of EOGS; Navigation with LEO-PNT; Secure Communications. This effort should, for example, bring ISR revisit time to 30 minutes or less.

- The European Resilience from Space programme will be open to subscription in November during the ESA Council meeting at ministerial level, in preparation of the EU EOGS programme which we expect to start in the next MFF, from 2028 onwards.
- Our vision is long-term, and structured. I believe this new, bold cooperation with the EU is an important step in permanently integrating security in our collective space efforts.
- This, I believe is what will make Europe prepared. It will show Europe's resolute commitment and ability to protect itself. It will support Member States and the Union in detering any potential adversary.
- ESA's Council meeting at ministerial level will prove a key litmus test for what can be achieved in this vital area today. Space is an essential tool. You will be the ones to use it but also those who will design and shape its future.
- Thank you.