

Sixty-second Session
of the Legal Subcommittee
of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Agenda item 13

General exchange of views on the legal aspects of space traffic management

Statement by Mr. Michael Friedl, Austria

22 March 2023

Madam Chair,

The use of space is vital for our daily lives. At the same time, the **increase in space activities**, the progressive congestion of the outer space environment as well as the multiplication and diversification of actors in the space arena are increasingly becoming a **challenge for the safe and sustainable conduct of space activities**. The safety and sustainability of the utilization of outer space for all peaceful uses needs to be ensured in the future. This is all the more relevant against the background of **new initiatives**, such as **mega satellite constellations**. Austria therefore believes that new rules and standards on space traffic management are needed.

Existing international space law already contains provisions that are of relevance for the **management of space traffic**, including the principles set forth in the **1967 Outer Space Treaty**, such as the **principle of non-appropriation of outer space** and the **use of outer space for peaceful purposes only**. Moreover, the **regimes on liability and registration** contained in the respective **Conventions of 1972 and 1975** are also relevant in the context of space traffic management.

Of importance in this regard are also the **international regulations of the ITU** regarding the **allocation of radio frequencies and satellite orbits**, which are essential to allow a conduct of space activities free from harmful interference. Moreover, a number of issues related to space traffic management are covered by **non-binding international instruments**, such as the **UNCOPUOS Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines adopted in 2007** or **UNGA Resolution 62/101 of 2007** on enhancing the practice of States and international intergovernmental organisations in registering space objects.

However, for an effective management of space traffic a **more rapid progress** of the work of the **Working Group on Long-term Sustainability** under the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee towards an **international governance regime** is needed. A **multilateral, comprehensive approach** is essential for enhancing the safety and sustainability of the use of outer space. Austria stands ready to support the efforts of the Working Group also regarding the **development of new guidelines** for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities and **recommendations for their further practical implementation**, taking into particular consideration the **requirements of emerging space nations and developing countries**.

In this regard Austria also supports the work of the **European Union** in contributing to a **common space traffic management approach**. The aim of the **Joint Communication on 'An EU Approach for Space Traffic Management – An EU contribution addressing a global**

challenge', as well as **respective conclusions** is to contribute to the long-term viability of space activities by ensuring that space remains a **safe and secure environment** by developing **best practices** and providing a **toolbox** to enable the Member states to implement safe space operations.

On this occasion, Austria would like to highlight the **situation with uncontrolled re-entries of space objects** and their **implications for aircraft in flight**. Due to the enormous growth of space activities and especially mega-constellations, there are thousands of objects in orbit and more to come, many of which will at one point re-enter the Earth's atmosphere. Already **several reports of close calls** have been reported, and just **last November part of the European airspace had been temporarily closed** to reduce risks from a re-entry. This risk poses not only a **severe disruption**, but also **unforeseen economic damage to airlines**, as well as knock-on damage to entire economies. Thus, Austria urges to see progress in these areas and **clarification of related aspects of governance in the area of Air and Space Traffic Management** and **enforced cooperation and interoperability** to reduce safety risks for aviation, as well as space operators and related infrastructures.

The time to act is now to **address space debris holistically** and to **develop a comprehensive approach to space debris** by incorporating the **avoidance of predictable collisions, orbital debris mitigation and remediation** as a first step towards the sustainable use of space. States should establish a **strong safety culture** in **recognizing and defining the limits to the space-Earth system**, such as **carrying capacities, maximum tolerable re-entry rates**. As another step, Austria emphasizes the **global development of standards** for **issuing and responding to precautionary safety warnings** related to uncontrolled re-entries which requires a **transparent sharing of relevant data** to enable rapid decision-making.

Let me conclude by reiterating that Austria fully supports efforts with regard to **Space Traffic Management within the framework of COPUOS and its Subcommittees** and especially encourages to further the cooperation with other relevant organisations such as **ITU, ICAO and IMO** leading to a multilateral governance within the framework of the UN.

Thank you!