

AUSTRIAN STATEMENT

58. STSC (19. – 30. April 2021)

ITEM 13

“Future Role and Method of Work of the Committee”

Madame Chair, Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Document A/AC.105/C.1/L.384 "*Governance and Method of work of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its Subsidiary Bodies*" contains proposals for improving the procedures and methods of work of COPUOS and its two subcommittees. In Part III "*Organisational measures under discussion*", several aspects are mentioned which are open to discussion. From an Austrian perspective, the following points seem to be of particular interest.

a. Participation of civil society

Regarding III/4. (e) "*To strengthen the criteria for international non-governmental organizations becoming permanent observers of the Committee and to provide regular updates on their status with the Economic and Social Council*", Austria would like to make the following comments:

At the meetings of COPOUS and its subcommittees, not only member states but also permanent observers are invited to participate in the discussion, make statements and provide answers to questionnaires. Permanent observers can be either intergovernmental organisations or non-governmental organisations. As permanent observers, non-governmental organisations take on important functions, such as enabling civil society to participate in the work of COPUOS and its subcommittees and facilitating input from technical experts during meetings, including on cutting-edge technology. They can make an important contribution to the study, clarification and development of topics discussed by the Committee.

Therefore Austria proposes the elaboration **clearly defined criteria for granting observer status** to the Committee.

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b. Working groups

The working groups of the COPUOS subcommittees offer delegations the opportunity to exchange views in a more informal setting. This informal setting often facilitates agreement on solutions and has an important complementary function to the work in plenary. This helps to focus debates. Considering these advantages, **more topics could be prepared and worked through in working groups.**

Delegations have only a limited number of members who have to divide their time between the working groups and the plenary. Austria would therefore like to propose that sufficient time is devoted to working groups and the schedule of the working groups is adapted according to the schedule of the plenary. The distribution between working group meetings and plenary sessions should be made more flexible in order to use the time efficiently.

Considering the multiple advantages of working groups, Austria would therefore support position III/ 1. (n) " *To allocate more time to the meetings of Working Groups* ".

c. Expert inputs

The *Scientific and Technical Subcommittee* provides the opportunity to organise symposia to inform delegations of the latest developments in space science and technology, as well as in space law and policy. The resulting discussions and exchanges of views are of great benefit to the work of COPOUS and its Subcommittees as well as to delegations.

Experience has shown that the contributions of experts are an important input to the work of the Committee and the two subcommittees and provide valuable input to the discussion among delegations. They can provide the necessary facts and data to enable informed decisions by the delegations.

Technical presentations are an effective method to bring expert opinions into the discussions of the committee. In order to focus the input on the ongoing discussions, we suggest that the **selection of the presentation be oriented closer to the respective agenda items.**

Austria therefore supports points III/ 1. (f) "*To allow only those presentations that are closely linked to the agenda items*" and (h) "*To establish selection criteria for presentations*".

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d. Improving the interaction between the two subcommittees

A recurring theme in the debates on the development of the work of COPUOS is the need to improve the interaction between the *Scientific and Technical Subcommittee* and the *Legal Subcommittee*.

The work of the two subcommittees could be improved if they reported to each other regularly and enabled a mutual flow of information. Austria would therefore like to propose that **joint meetings** of the two subcommittees without shortening the overall allocated meeting time be scheduled or that the time and possibly certain **agenda items of each subcommittee be reserved for reports from the other subcommittee**.

Among others, the following topics could be considered for joint assessment and discussion: **Space debris removal and orbital maintenance** (including relevant studies, mathematical modelling and other analytical work to characterise the space debris environment) as well as **Space Traffic Management and Coordination**.

Let me conclude by saying that we should make use of the **digital possibilities available to the committee** so as not to postpone our discussions. Throughout the last year, we have all seen the advantages and disadvantages of virtual and hybrid-meetings. The number of participants is higher and we reach more people. Seminars and symposia had three times as many participants through virtual or hybrid participation than through exclusively physical meetings. Certainly, there was a lack of face-to-face exchange, but digital meetings are a very good format for information sharing and presentations.

Our conclusion is that for certain purposes a digital format can be very useful, for example to prepare topics. We should therefore use the experiences made and lessons drawn in the current challenging situation to make our work better known and involve more people. To this end, we would like to commend the **active role of UNOOSA** in the last year with numerous **webinar series** that addressed current topics of our meetings, such as space economy, space sustainability, space law, Space4Women, UN-SPIDER and others.

Together we should consider how we can make best use of these opportunities and continue to include parts of them in our future work.

THANK YOU

