"EU Space Programme: key contribution to sustainability and growth" – Tuesday, Sept. 27th – 16:00-19:00 – Prague House

Panel Discussion 2: Innovation and entrepreneurship in the space sector

Intervention O. Lemaitre, Eurospace

Many thanks for inviting me today. I realise that this session is about "innovation and entrepreneurship"; nevertheless, and even if I represent the "upstream" Industry, my intervention will be about the roles of operators. For a very obvious reason: because operators are the natural customers of Industry, they are the entities to which we sell our products, they are actually the ones that can drive entrepreneurship and on which innovation in services is based. Let me explain:

Today, we are very fortunate to witness the significant increase of the ambitions of the EU in space; for us industry, it means that the institutional demand is "leaning" proportionally more and more towards operational infrastructures (as compared to, for instance, ESA science- or innovation-driven programmes), more akin to the national military systems, private satcoms or meteorological satellites.

And what is the other obvious common point between these operational infrastructures? **They are all designed with efficient operations in mind, and are managed (and owned) by dedicated operators**.

The consequence is, as it was the case for telecom or meteorology, an ever-increasing importance of the quality, stability and sustainability of service, stability, increased (cyber-)security requirements and, of course, security of supply. And let me insist here, security of supply not only as a long-term political objective, but as a very operational one: as an operator, you cannot afford the risk of disrupting your services because a supplier went bankrupt or has been taken over by a foreign entity. All these concerns require resources, technical competences, reactivity, sufficient margin of manoeuvre…

And indeed, the full success of the EU space programme will only happen once the EU will have at its disposal "educated" and empowered customers of space systems. Because the products that we, in the upstream sector, are providing, can only be transformed in value-adding services if there are operators that are in charge of

- Ensuring the interface between the stakeholders in charge of the development phase, the service providers and the end-users;
- Taking responsibility for long-term operations and evolution of the infrastructure;
- Ensuring the delivery of continuous and reliable data and services to users.

Until very recently, the responsibilities in the exploitation of the EU space programmes have fallen on a hotchpotch of agencies (GSA, Eumetsat and ESA).

Today, finally, a growing number of tasks is being entrusted to EUSPA, which of course makes sense. Nevertheless, the current situation of understaffing within EUSPA and its slow rise are still subjects of concern. It takes time and resources to set up strong and competent operators, let us not waste time.

Of course, the road will not stop there. The natural next step after the deployment and exploitation of operational space infrastructures is a “shift of power” from the data supply side to the processing and distribution of information. This trend benefits the large IT companies which are particularly strong in the US but largely absent in Europe.

As they become a key channel to the markets, those owning data management platforms will take control of the distribution of critical information (geospatial information in particular). Obviously, Europe will have difficulties in competing with the business models of GAFAM, but it must set up a competitive “ecosystem”, it is as strategic as owning your own refineries if you produce petrol!