IAC – 08 – E8.5.2

NETWORK OF EUROPEN REGIONS USING SPACE TECHNOLOGIES AN UPDATE ON THE NEREUS CONSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

The Outer Space research and development programmes give a consolidated model for international cooperation. They represent a good framework to develop and enhance different initiatives at global, regional and local level. The impact of space activities covers different areas of interest such as: the development of Earth observation applications for environment monitoring and risk prevention and management, the development of satellite communications and information systems, the exploitation of global satellite positioning and navigation systems, the knowledge of the Universe, the utilisation of ground segment engineering. These activities involve also the regional and local governments. This is particularly evident if we look at the competences of the European regional governments. Several European Regions deal with a number of issues in areas linked to space activities. In line with these reflections a number of European regional governments supported by the Committee of the Regions launched the idea to create a Network of European Regions Using Space technologies – NEREUS. This Network is an International non-profit Association (AISBL) under the Belgian Law. The aim of this paper is to review the course of the initiative since its launch in April 2006, giving an update of the work done for its constitution.

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this paper is to analyse and assess the legal basis for the cooperation among European regional governments, which has been established in recent years. In particular, this article offers an update[1] of the work done for the constitution of the Network of European Regions Using Space technologies (NEREUS).

The idea of implementing a network of European regions to promote the use of space services has been presented, for the first time, by the Midi-Pyrénées Region, during the Conference on the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES)[2], held in Graz in April 2006.

A significant advancement has been performed since the end of 2006, with the conclusion of the NEREUS' Political Charter, signed in Toulouse on 18 December 2007 by the interested European regions, and the enter into force of the NEREUS Statute in June 2008.

Today NEREUS is an International non-profit Association under the Belgian law, located in Brussels.

The Political Charter and the Statute of the Network offer the basis for future activities of the new International Association.

The present article reviews the course of the initiative since its launch in April 2006. First, we will recall the evolution of the role of States in the exercise of Space activities taking into particular account the Outer Space

Treaty of 1967. Then we analyse the role of the European regional governments within the EU Space Policy. Therefore we will focus the paper on the main aspects of the Network, giving an update of the work done for its constitution: the definition of the organizational structure, the objectives and the methods of work, the definition of the cooperative activities and the common projects within the Network.

1. THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROLE OF STATES IN SPACE ACTIVITIES

States are the primary and major subjects of international law.
The role of States was predominant during the "Cold War", which was characterized by the rivalry between the USA and USSR, on the level of prestige as well as on the level of military capabilities[3]. In that period, space activities were largely either military or scientific[4]. This was reflected in the beginning of space law: the Outer Space Treaty[5] of 1967 was largely established to prevent extension of the arms race into outer space, and to preserve the freedom of exploration of outer space[6].
The progress of science and technology in space activities as well as the changes in global politics and international relations led to a new dimension of space activities.
This is particularly evident if we look at the new applications of space technologies in the field of telecommunications, satellite navigation systems and Earth observation.
With the rising profitability of space activities in these fields, the increasing interest of the private sector leads to a gradually evolving tendency towards the relocation of parts of the activities to the non-state players.

However, States remain the major and predominant actors of space law. States form custom, treaties and other legal instruments, they create international organisations, regulate, supervise and license private operators within their national legislation, which must conform with international obligations[7].

The role of States in space activities is expressly foreseen by Article VI of the Outer Space Treaty of 1967.
According to Article VI of the Outer Space Treaty, States bear international, political and legal responsibilities for all national space activities – whether they are carried out by private or public entities - and for assuring that national activities are carried out in conformity with the provision set in the Treaty[8].
Article VI also affirms that States have to authorize and supervise the space activities of non governmental entities placed under their jurisdiction.
Finally, Article VI expressly recognises the role of international organisations in performing space activities. In order to assure that the international organisations comply with the provision of the Treaty, Article VI provides that when activities are carried out by an international organisation, the responsibility for these activities shall be borne both by the international organization and by the States Parties to the Treaty participating in such organization[9].

Therefore States are the actors of the exploration and use of outer space, but their role is now decreasing. We can observe an increasing importance of the non-governmental sector and the consequent emergence of various new actors on the space scene, e.g. private entities or Non Governmental Organisations (ONG)[10].
In line with these considerations, the major States define a national space policy and thus develop space programmes to implement this policy.

2. THE EU SPACE POLICY

The deepening of integration in the framework of the European Union implies new questions also for space-related undertakings. The European Space Agency (ESA) and the European Union jointly work on an intensification of their relationship, in order to create a coherent and highly competitive environment for the European strategy for space[11].

"ESA and the EU are two distinctive organisations with their own legal bases, different mandates and membership and different funding mechanisms"[12].
ESA has provided for more than 30 years an efficient structure for European cooperation on joint space projects. The independence and reliability of ESA, thanks to the support of its Member States, contribute to the increasing role of Europe in space, through the successful development of the European space sector, and to the strong position of the European space industry on world markets.
For many years, cooperation between ESA and EU regarding specific projects has been carried out on a case-by-case basis. Today, the EU considers the space sector as a strategic domain which can directly contribute to the implementation of a large group of European policy objectives, such as the Europe's Sustainable Development Strategy, the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment.

In April 2007 the European Union adopted the document on the "European Space Policy"[13], presented as a proposal of the ESA Director General and as a Communication of the European Commission.
The implementation of the "European Space Policy" represents the major step in establishing a coordinated and effective European space effort of ESA and EU.

The basis for the institutional relationship between ESA and EU has been established in the EC-ESA Framework Agreement[14], signed in 2003 and officially entered into force on 28 May 2004.
The Preamble of the Framework Agreement states that ESA and EC recognize that they have "specific complementary and mutually reinforcing strengths" and "commit themselves to cooperate in an efficient and mutually beneficial manner", to avoid "any unnecessary duplication of effort"[15].
The final aim of this Framework Agreement is to address the coherent and progressive development of an overall European Space Policy able "to link demand for services and applications using space system in support of the Community policies with the supply of space systems and infrastructures necessary to meet that demand"[16].

The document on the "European Space Policy" has been elaborated taking into account the "White Paper on Space Policy"[17], titled "Space a New European Frontier for an Expanding Union", which was adopted by the European Commission on 11 November 2003. It provides the overall political framework for the development of a viable and strong European space sector which will seek:

- to develop and exploit European space applications serving Europe's public policy objectives and the needs of European enterprises and citizens
- to establish appropriate funding arrangements for the operational phase of EU programmes such as the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) and the European Satellite Navigation System (GALILEO) to increase synergy between defence and civil space programmes and technologies
- to contribute to the knowledge based society by investing strongly in space-based science
- to ensure a strong and competitive space industry which foster innovation, growth and the development and delivery of sustainable, high quality, cost-effective services
- to develop a more coordinated and coherent approach to international relations in space

The European Space Policy will be implemented through the establishment of a common European Space Programme, serving as a basis for coordination of national and European level space activities.
The European Space Programme will be the main instrument to implement the most important space related initiatives, in particular the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES), or the GALILEO programme.
The success and sustainability of these space programmes can only be achieved through a

user-driven approach[18]. The main target of the European Union nowadays is to set-up a more open and permanent dialogue with the largest possible users' community for the new services which will be developed within the GMES and GALILEO.

The document on the European Space Policy restates the role and the responsibilities of the European Union, ESA and the Member States. The European Union has the task to define the priorities, aggregate the political will and users' demand and ensure the availability and continuity of services. ESA and its Member States have the task to develop space technologies and systems according to the objectives of the European Space Policy. Finally, Member States, under the coordination of ESA and in close cooperation with the EU, should provide the best expertise for European Space Programmes and increase synergy between national, ESA and EC contributions to space programmes.
The final aim is to progressively achieve an integrated approach respecting national sovereignty. Therefore the European Space Programme should be elaborated through a process of dialogue including all stakeholders: EU, ESA, Members States with their national space agencies, national research centres, European industries, European organisations such as EUMETSAT, EEA, etc.

Within this framework, the involvement of the regional and local dimension is essential in order to collect users' requirements and to ensure new space services. The active participation of European regions is also requested to enhance the awareness of potential advantages coming from future space-based services.
Regional governments can represent the new players in outer space in an environment previously ruled only by national governments, the European Union and the European Space Agency.

3. THE ROLE OF REGIONS IN THE EU SPACE POLICY: THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY

At the beginning of the 21st century the development of the EU is faced with a number of major tasks of historic importance: the enlargement of Europe to include the new Member States, the establishment of political, economic, social and monetary Union, the consolidation of EU's position as a global player.
Technological changes, the information and communications revolution, globalization and the integration of markets are all elements of an increasingly interdependent world.
Consequently, there is a growing number of issues that cannot be dealt within the boundaries of national States. There is a large area of issues having an European dimension, whereas for other issues the EU must act more on the international level.
There is a growing number of public and private decisions taken at European and international level, which affect directly the daily life of citizens.
In this context the principle of subsidiarity - in the sense of proximity, with decisions taken at the institutional and operational level closest to the citizens, ensuring the recognition, enhancement and involvement of private individuals and their social groupings – becomes more and more important.
The principle of subsidiarity, as defined in Article 5 of the EC Treaty, applies exclusively to the relations between the Community and the Member States, and not to the relations between sub-national bodies and the Member States. The relations between sub-national bodies and Member States are regulated by the constitutional systems of each Member States.
However, the Committee of the Regions[19], created in 1994 as a consultative body of the EU, is based on the subsidiarity principle to ensure that the decisions are taken as close as possible to the citizens.
The Committee of Regions acknowledges that EU actions, in accordance to the subsidiarity principle, not only concern the Member States but also their regional and local governments.

Concerning the concept of region there is a problem of definition. The concept of region considerably varies in Europe.
Local and regional authorities in the EU Member States have different structures and denominations: Länder, Regions, Counties, Provinces, Autonomous Communities[20].
Generally, in the context of the Committee of the Regions, the word "region" refers to the territorial administration which is directly subordinated to the central administration, and endowed with an independent political representation[21].

The increasing role of the regional governments within the Member States as well as in the EU policies, for bringing citizens closer to decision making centres, has also affected the space sector.
Regions are legitimate stakeholders in the EU Space Policy. Despite the different size and territorial characteristics of European regions and the different functions granted to the regional entities, most European regional governments deal with a number of issues linked with space activities.
European regions are involved in space activities from infrastructures to the use of applications. They are involved in the installation, development and maintenance of space infrastructures, the so-called "Ground Segment". They play a major role in the process of innovation and promote the process of transferring technologies from research sector to commercial sector. They give a significant contribution to the creation and support of clusters and competitiveness zones that bring together manufacturers (also Small and Medium Enterprises - SME), higher education and scientific research. They are users of satellite data having competences in the field of environment, territorial management, agriculture, emergencies and security. They are in charge of the development of territorial and marine spatial planning and they provide different services to the citizens.
Therefore the regional dimension is essential to the definition and use of space services.
The involvement of regional entities makes it possible to open up the space sector to players, others than those of the traditional space sector: service providers, content providers, public and private users. This phenomenon considerably enhances the potential of the space sector in terms of benefits for European citizens.

In this spirit, and following the example of existing regional associations, such as the Peripheral Maritime Regions Conference (PMRC), a number of European Regions, supported by the Committee of the Regions, launched the idea of creating a Network of European Regions Using Space technologies (NEREUS), in order to strengthen the dialogue among the regional authorities.

4. A NEW FORM OF COOPERATION: THE NETWORK OF EUROPEAN REGIONS USING SPACE TECHNOLOGIES (NEREUS)

The idea of establishing a Network of European Regions Using Space technologies has been presented by the Midi-Pyrénées Region during the GMES Conference, "A Market for GMES in Europe and its Regions – The Graz Dialogue", organised in Graz on 19-20 April 2006, by the Austrian Government during its EU Presidency.
From the extensive discussion held during the Conference, the Austrian EU Presidency prepared a document including recommenddations for the further development of GMES in Europe, titled "The Graz Roadmap for GMES services development"[22].
The Graz Roadmap highlights and recommends the creation of a Network of European Regions Using Space technologies to reinforce the dialogue among all concerned actors.
From December 2006, a group of European regions started the discussion on the actual implementation of this Network of European Regions, defining the objectives, the structure and the future activities of the Network.
The focus of the Network shall be on the use of space technologies, in order to federate new users and their information needs and to promote the development of solutions responding to the various needs.

The process for the constitution of the Network of European Regions Using Space technologies (NEREUS)[23] has been carried out for more than two years.
The Network was inaugurated in Toulouse at the Midi Pyrenees Regional Council on 18 December 2007. On that occasion 22 Regions coming from 9 European Member States signed the NEREUS Political Charter[24].
The Network is governed by a Statute[25] which entered into force on June 2008. According to the Statute, NEREUS is an International non-profit Association (AISBL).
The Association is open to the access of regions of the European Member States.
At present, 21 regions have finalised their membership procedure, becoming full members of the Networks: the City of Vienna (Austria), Wallone, Brussels Capital Region (Belgium), Midi Pyrenees (France), Abruzzo, Basilicata, Lombardia, Molise, Puglia, Veneto (Italy), Brandenburg, Bremen, Hessen, Bayern, Baden-Wurttemberg (Germany), Mazovia (Poland), Açores (Portugal), Andalucia, Castilla y Leon, City of Madrid (Spain) and East Midlands (United Kingdom). Others regions have already expressed their intention to join the network.

The first General Assembly of NEREUS took place on 7 July 2008 at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels.

4.1 OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE NETWORK

The Network supports the strategies set up by the European Union in its European Space Policy, articulating the common interest of Regions within the EU space programs. The initiative aims at strengthening the dialogue between the regional authorities and the main actors in the space sector such as the European Commission, the European Space Agency, the Member States and the European space industry.

NEREUS is independent from the EU institutions, it should be a representative voice of the regions in order to identify their joint concerns and suggestion with regards to the EU Space Policy.

The NEREUS Political Charter establishes the main objectives of the Network[26]:

- To introduce the regional level in the elaboration and development of European space programmes and activities linked to infrastructures and applications.
- To promote and implement partnerships and cooperation between European regions, in order to develop common or complementary approaches and policies.
- To sustain the fulfilment of the end-users' needs in the space services provided by the European Union programs.
- To ensure that space services are used across all the regions for ensuring a balanced development of the European Union.
- To support a better promotion of the European space dimension in a context of increasing worldwide competition.
- To increase the citizens' participation in the European policy construction and in the developing of the Space services market.

In order to accomplish these objectives, the Network could pursue the following activities[27]:

- To carry out research projects and programs in all major fields of space technologies
- To spread the information concerning the available sources of financing in Europe, both public and private, in order to allow NEREUS members to build up projects on space technologies
- To organize workshops, study seminars, educational activities and supervise scientific studies, plans, in order to enhance the dissemination of knowledge on space technologies
- To carry out activities such as identifying final users, mapping common issues and needs, sharing problems related to space applications and federating users' demand

- To express the opinion of the regions involved about EU publications having an impact on matters concerning NEREUS' aims.

All the activities of the Network should be in harmony with the activities of the concerned institutions in Europe and open to international cooperation.

4.2 STRUCTURE OF THE NETWORK

The Network NEREUS has the legal status of an international non-profit association (AISBL) under the Belgian Law. The Secretariat of the Association is located in Brussels.

Article 5 of the Statute states that the Association has two categories of members: full members and associate members.
Full membership is open to regions or territorial entities from all EU Member States formally acknowledged as "regions". As mentioned in paragraph 3, the word "region" refers to the territorial administration with a measure of autonomy which is directly subordinated to the central administration and endowed with an independent political representation.
When regions, as above defined, do not exist, public institutions representing territorial areas comparable to regions can be considered as full members. In the countries where regional authority is not in force, the admission as full members of lower level governmental authorities will be taken into consideration, on condition that they are not municipalities.

Associate membership is open to local authorities (other than regions), industries, Small and Medium Enterprises (SME), associations, foundations, banks, universities, as long as they have competences, knowledge and interest within the NEREUS aims.

The membership of the Association is linked to the payment of the annual subscription fees.

The organisation of the Network includes the following organs:

- The General Assembly, composed of representatives of all NEREUS members. The Assembly, where each region has one vote[28], is the political body of NEREUS. The General Assembly shall meet at least once a year. The Assembly elects the Management Board, the President, the Vice-President and the treasurer of the Association. It shall approve the political guidelines and the budget of NEREUS
- The Management Board, elected by the General Assembly, for a period of two years. The members should be representatives of regional authorities. The Management Board proposes the political guidelines for NEREUS and implements the decisions adopted by the General Assembly.
- The General Secretariat, headed by a Director who is the permanent working organ of the Association.
- The Working Groups, set up by the Management Board. Their aim is to carry out the work programme of the Network. The Working Groups are organised around specific themes of cooperation.

4.3 COMMON PROJECTS WITHIN THE NETWORK

The Working Groups will be the real "core" of NEREUS' activities. In fact, the definition and the implementation of a strategic development plan for NEREUS depend on the actual activities of the Working Groups.

At present the NEREUS members have identified four initial Working Groups covering a broad range of space activities and programmes:

1. **GMES and Earth Observation**: GMES services are closely linked with the daily life of citizens, providing immediately usable terrestrial, oceanographic and atmospheric data for environmental protection and security of citizens. End users operating at the regional level can take advantage of GMES core

services, and will contribute to develop downstream services.

2. The European Satellite Navigation System – GALILEO: Many sectors managed by regional administrations are affected by the development of satellite navigation, e.g. transport and communication, land survey, agriculture, fisheries and waterways, tourism, waste disposal and logistic domain. Navigation systems also provide instruments for civil protection, emergency management and humanitarian aid.

3. Telecommunication: Distance learning, remote medicine, remote health and remote administration are key fields of application for the future in every region. Information and telecommunication technologies play a key role in improving the quality of services delivered at the regional level

4. Acquisition of Knowledge, Education, Training and Communication with the Public: the need to develop new applications and technologies for present and future space programmes requires improvement of the current knowledge. Research centres and universities in Europe are able to meet this challenge, supporting industry activities in a competitive world. Regional administrations shall involve the education process at all levels.

The organisation of the Working Groups is in progress. Nowadays, the main challenge is to nominate the Working Groups' leaders, to identify and motivate, by the end of 2008, specific sub-themes for each Working Group on the basis of clear criteria and stakeholders consultations.
The first "Kick-off meeting" for each Working Group is scheduled for autumn 2008.

CONCLUSIONS

Since 2006, when the idea to establish a Network of European Regions Using Space technologies emerged, discussions have taken place between the interested European regions, regarding the actual implementation of the Network. The initial discussion concerned the aspects of the role, necessity and functioning of the Network.
Now the Network of European Regions Using Space technologies (NEREUS) has become a reality.
The General Assembly, held on 7 July 2008 at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels, elected the organs of the Association: the Management Board, the President and the Vice-President. The next step to complete the establishment of a fully operational Network includes the implementation of the Working Groups, mentioned in the paragraph 4.3.
For the successful development of the Network in space activities, it is now necessary to identify programmes and projects in which the members of the Association can cooperate and effectively undertake joint activities.

The European objective to involve regions in the construction of the European Space Policy aims to consider the final users needs in the realization of space-based services, following the subsidiarity principle.
This new emerging form of cooperation in Europe opens a new dimension of space activities that look at the space from a different point of view taking into consideration the new emerging concept of subsidiarity in the European governance as well as the European environmental policy and law, the economic development and the scientific community.
Today EU considers space applications as an important tool at the service of numerous European objectives and policies: such as transport and mobility, information society, environmental protection, land use planning, agriculture and sustainable development.
In this context the involvement of Regional Authorities can give a significant contribution to support the development of European space applications, exploiting new emerging markets.

[1] M. Morelli, P. Campostrini, "The Role of European Regions in the EU Space Policy", Proceedings of the 58th IAC Congress, Hyderabad, 24-29 September 2007.
[2] GMES Conference, "A Market for GMES in Europe and its Regions – The Graz Dialogue", Graz, 19 - 20 April 2006.
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[4] F. von der Dunk, "National Space Legislation", Proceedings of the 10th European Summer Course on Space Law and Policy of ECSL , Nice, 27 August – 8 September 2001, pp.33-36.
[5] Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, 610 UNTS 205, 27 January 1967.
[6] Ibidem Art.I: "The exploration and use of outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic or scientific development, and shall be the province of all mankind.
Outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies shall be free for exploration and use by all States without discrimination of any kind, on a basis of equality and in accordance with international law, and there shall be free access to all areas of celestial bodies.
There shall be freedom of scientific investigation in outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, and States shall facilitate and encourage international cooperation in such investigation."
[7] E. Back Impallomeni, "Sources of Space Law", Proceedings of the 11th European Summer Course on Space Law and Policy of ECSL, La Rochelle, 2-13 September 2002, pp.4-14.
[8] Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, 610 UNTS 205, 27 January 1967, Art. VI: "States Parties to the Treaty shall bear international responsibility for national activities in outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, whether such activities are carried on by governmental agencies or by non-governmental entities, and for assuring that national activities are carried out in conformity with the provisions
set forth in the present Treaty. The activities of non-governmental entities in outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, shall require authorization and continuing supervision by the appropriate State Party to the Treaty(...)"
[9] Ibidem Art. VI: "(...)When activities are carried on in outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, by an international organization, responsibility for compliance with this Treaty shall be borne both by the international organization and by the States Parties to the Treaty participating in such organization."
[10] S. Hobe, J. Hettling, "Challenges to Space Law in the 21st Century – Project 2001 Plus", Proceedings of the 45th Colloquium on the Law of Outer Space of IISL, Houston, October 2002, pp. 51-55.
[11] Ibidem.
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[17] COM(2003) 673, White Paper "Space: a New European Frontier for an Expanding Union. An Action Plan for Implementing the European Space Policy", Brussels, 11 November 2003.
[18] Report from the Presidency to the Council, "A Market for GMES in Europe and its Regions- the Graz Dialogue 19 – 20 April 2006", acknowledged in Brussels on 15 May 2006.
[19] The Maastricht Treaty, 7 February 1992, Art.4 : "The Council and the Commission shall be assisted by an Economic and Social Committee of the Regions acting in an advisory capacity."
[20] F. Massart , "Panorama des missions et competences régionales au travers de l'Europe", Atelier GMES " Le role des Régions européennes dans GMES", Toulouse, 9 mars 2006. http://recherche.midipyrenees.fr/IMG/pdf/gmes-session2-massart.pdf
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[22] Report from the Presidency to the Council, "A Market for GMES in Europe and its Regions- the Graz Dialogue 19 – 20 April 2006", acknowledged in Brussels on 15 May 2006.
[23] The Network is named NEREUS - Network of European Regions Using Space technologies. www.nereus-regions.eu
[24] Charter on the Creation and the Implementation of the Network of European Regions Using Space Technologies-NEREUS, signed in Toulouse on 18 December 2007.
[25] Statute of the Network of the European Regions Using Space Technologies, entered into force on 13 June 2008.

[26] Charter on the Creation and the Implementation of the Network of European Regions Using Space Technologies-NEREUS, signed in Toulouse on 18 December 2007, Paragraph 1, p.2

[27] Statute of the Network of the European Regions Using Space Technologies, entered into force on 16 June 2008, Title I Art. 3.

[28] Ibidem Title II Art.5. Only full members have the right to vote at General Assembly meetings, whereas associate members have a status of observers.