

European Space Forum '26: What role does Europe want to play in space?

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On June 30 and July 1, 2026, the 6th European Space Forum took place in Brussels. Under the title “Urgency and Ambition: Europe at a Crossroads”, representatives from politics, industry and various European institutions came together. The agenda included, among other things, the regulation of European space activities, their funding, access to space, satellite communications, Earth observation and international cooperation.

Across the various topics, the discussion repeatedly returned to the question of what role Europe wants to play in international space activities and what conditions need to be created to achieve this.

The EU Space Act

One of the topics of the forum was the EU Space Act. The proposal of the European Commission aims to create a common European framework for space activities. Among other things, it addresses safety, sustainability

and the resilience of the European space sector. At the forum, the proposal and its potential impact on Europe's space sector were discussed.

The topic is relevant because space activities in Europe have so far been strongly shaped by national regulations. Different requirements can create additional obstacles for companies when they operate in several European countries. A more harmonised framework could make cooperation within Europe easier. At the same time, it is important when designing the framework to ensure that new requirements keep pace with the development of the space sector.

The EU Space Act therefore concerns a fundamental prerequisite for the further development of European space activities: the legal conditions under which companies and other actors operate.

Funding as a Basis for New Projects

Funding for European space activities was also an important part of the conference. The session "Funding Ambition" focused, among other things, on ESA budgets as well as planned funding from the European Competitiveness Fund and Horizon Europe. The role of private investment and start-ups was also discussed.

The question of funding is particularly relevant for the space sector, as many projects involve high development costs and long planning periods. At the same time, private companies and investors are playing an increasingly important role in the European space sector.

For Europe, the question is therefore how public and private investment can work together and how companies can be supported in developing internationally competitive technologies.

Access to Space

Another key focus was access to space. In the relevant session, discussions focused on how Europe can secure and further develop its launch capabilities in the long term. This included European launch systems, new providers and cooperation between different European actors.

The topic is strategically important because European space programmes depend on reliable launch capabilities. Satellites can only fulfil their functions if they can actually be launched into space. Having its own launch capabilities gives Europe more control over access to space and reduces dependence on foreign providers.

Especially in the context of the European discussion on strategic autonomy, this area therefore plays an important role.

Satellite Communications and New Networks

The European Space Forum also addressed the future of satellite communications. Topics included Direct-to-Device technologies, Non-Terrestrial Networks and the integration of different communication systems.

Satellites may play a greater role in providing communication services in the future. This is particularly relevant for regions where terrestrial infrastructure is not fully developed. At the same time, satellite-based systems can provide additional options when existing communication networks fail.

For Europe, this area is also connected to the question of secure communication options. Programmes such as GOVSATCOM and IRIS² aim to expand European capabilities for secure satellite-based communications.

Earth Observation and the Use of Satellite Data

Another area of discussion was Earth observation. With Copernicus, Europe already has an extensive system for observing the Earth. At the conference, discussions included how public and commercial Earth observation systems can work together and how existing data can be used more effectively.

Earth observation data is used in various areas, including environmental monitoring, agriculture, disaster management and security. At the same time, new commercial satellites are creating additional sources of data and new opportunities for companies.

The further development of this area therefore also depends on how well public programmes and private services can be connected.

International Cooperation

Alongside European developments, international cooperation also played a role. In the area of space diplomacy, discussions focused on how the geopolitical situation is affecting international space partnerships and discussions focused on how the changing geopolitical situation is affecting Europe's international space partnerships and alliances.

Europe relies on international cooperation for many space projects. At the same time, it aims to strengthen its own technological and industrial base. This creates a tension in European space policy between international cooperation and the desire for greater autonomy.

What Became Clear at the Forum?

The various discussions at the European Space Forum show that the European space sector is facing several interconnected challenges. These include sufficient funding, common regulations, its own launch capabilities, secure communication and the further development of European industry.

The topics of the EU Space Act and access to space in particular show that technological development and political frameworks are closely connected. New space technologies require appropriate investment and a suitable legal framework. At the same time, the necessary infrastructure and industrial capabilities need to be in place.

The forum therefore placed a focus on areas that are crucial for Europe's future position in space. The central question remains how existing European programmes, investments and political objectives can be translated into long-term capabilities.