Italian, German and French Cooperation in Aerospace

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Returning to the evening seminar, organized by the Italian Embassy in Berlin, it was a unique opportunity to engage directly with space industry experts, facilitated by the EPIS Think Tank. The seminar took place on March 24, 2025, and was a collaborative effort between the Italian Embassy and EPIS. We were welcomed by the ambassadors of France and Italy in Germany, followed by keynote speeches from Col. Domenico Antonacci (Chief of Space Capability Development, Italian Air Force) and Brig. Gen. Jürgen Schrödl (German Army – Space Operations). Both introduced the audience to current space capabilities. A panel discussion followed, featur-

ing speakers including Marie-Christine von Hahn (CEO, BDLI – German Aerospace Industries Association), Sabine von der Recke (OHB System AG), Giuseppe Adrion (Leonardo Space Division), Klaus Michel, and Oliver Dubroeucq—representing four different companies. One key takeaway was the reminder that "the final discussion should always be with the customer."

It was during this seminar that someone stated that Europe is "not suitable for some moments." But what does that really mean? The remark likely reflects concerns that Europe is falling behind in areas such as space technology, AI development, and private sector innovation. Fortunately, several recommendations were made on how to overcome these challenges. Among them, reducing regulatory barriers, improving coordination in funding structures, and addressing weaknesses in political and governmental frameworks. The importance of "special skills to drive progress" was also emphasized.

So, what kind of special skills are required? First and foremost, Europe needs to ensure a competitive and robust space market. This includes collaboration between large and small companies, the development of technologically mature ecosystems, and enhancing global competitiveness. Working at a faster pace was also considered essential. However, one speaker countered by stating that the German and broader European space industries are already on a "high level" and are growing rapidly. Recent developments such as Ariane 6 and the Arctic Weather Satellite were cited. Still, space remains a complex domain. One major challenge is that Germany and Europe often lack access to the critical materials needed for transformative industrial shifts.

While increasing work speed and collaboration are often promoted as solutions, speakers cautioned that "the industry cannot move faster than the customer." Another important point raised was Europe's "tight link to sovereignty"—a concept that underscores concerns about Europe's strategic autonomy in the space domain. As global competition intensifies, especially in launch technologies and AI, Europe must define its own path. However, the future remains uncertain. What's needed now is trust, strategic vision, and appropriate regulation.

Defence was also a key theme—not just protection, but also proactive capability development. Success in space is directly linked to national security, encompassing technologies such as air defence systems, drones, and robotics. This discussion served as a reminder of the critical role defence companies play in shaping Europe's space future. This led to the final major question: What can Europe do in times of geopolitical instability, such as the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, to secure its safety?

One answer, emphasized particularly by speakers from France, was the importance of partnership strategies in securing both sovereignty and resilience. Several important questions about the future remain unanswered. In the United States, the new presidential term under Donald Trump brought a shift in political priorities. As the speakers emphasized, space-re-

lated negotiations with the U.S. should not be overlooked in governmental agendas. On the contrary, Europe should aim to compete with the United States in this strategically critical domain. For some, the question may arise: Why must Europe compete with the U.S.? During the panel, a presentation clearly illustrated that Europe's space budget is eight times smaller than that of the U.S., with an investment of only €26 per citizen. This highlights the need for greater support of start-ups and private innovation.

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