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## **ENHANCING EU-CHINA SPACE COOPERATION**

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**ENHANCING EU – CHINA SPACE COOPERATION**

The enhancement of cooperation in space projects can be an efficient strategy for increasing and deepening the scope and quality of the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the European Union (EU).

The development of ambitious and innovative space schemes, including the launch of research initiatives aimed at deepening knowledge of outer space and human exploration missions, has become a major strategic goal for the EU and China. In fact, such schemes have been utilised both to emphasise the symbolic prestige and practical power of both world powers respectively. Furthermore, both the EU and China have become increasingly aware of the role of space programmes as both a

driving force and a catalyst for the transition into a truly knowledge-based economy. On the European side of things, significant space programmes have been developed under the framework of the European Space Agency (ESA) and, in recent years through joint ESA-EU initiatives. These initiatives have benefited from existing European technological expertise in the field and, in turn, both organizations have put their support firmly behind the continued development of such knowhow. At the same time, ESA has forged strong partnerships with other important space actors such as NASA and JAXA. Comparatively, the Chinese space programme has - to a large extent *independently* - made impressive progress during the last few years. Various human exploration missions like *Shenzhou VII*, which involved the first time Chinese extra-vehicular activity, are the most visible examples of the Chinese ambitions and growing capabilities.

There are further opportunities to foster win-win cooperative stratagems in this field. Both parties have clear vested interests in international collaborations and partnerships for space projects. They also share the view that space is a public good and therefore defend unrestricted access to it. A stronger commitment to cooperation would form a clear international statement against any attempt to deny access to outer space or to weaponize it. It would, for instance, provide a counterweight to the American propensity to defend a doctrine of exclusivity. Finally, cooperation would be an efficient means of increasing mutual understanding and transparency between both actors. Particularly, the Chinese space agenda is at present somewhat opaque and a greater interdependence in civilian space projects would offer a good opportunity for both actors to reinforce their trust.

With this in mind, two distinct opportunities for increased cooperation in space matters between the EU and China appear. First, existing scientific collaborations in the framework of the European Galileo Project and the Chinese lunar programme *Chang'e* should be pursued. Second, in line with the EU's objectives under the Lisbon Treaty, and building on the foundations of prior initiatives by China and Russia on one hand and the EU on the other, a dialogue on the development of binding international space regulations should be promoted.

An example of existing technical cooperation between the actors is found in the Galileo programme. Galileo is a major European effort aimed at ensuring European autonomy with regard to the Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS). Mainly due to governance and budgetary problems, the process has encountered significant delays and its outcomes still remain uncertain. This situation is of real concern, as Galileo serves to a great extent as a test of the credibility of the European

technological and strategic agendas. It is noteworthy that in 2003 a direct Chinese contribution of 200 million euros was agreed to support the project. In the meantime, Beijing has nevertheless decided to develop its own Navigation Satellite System called *Compass*. A clarification and specification of the terms of the 2003 agreement, a more intense dialogue on the opportunities and challenges presented by the partner's programme, better follow-up and improved transparency would certainly officiate a more effective collaboration between China and the EU. It would furthermore facilitate the efficient management and implementation of both projects.

From its side, China has launched an ambitious lunar programme leading up to a human exploration mission by 2020. Because the lunar programme serves as highly visible proof of its increasing expertise in the field, China has provided significant financial and political support to this project. Consequently, opportunities for the involvement of external actors are slim, especially given that the programme aims to enhance, to a great extent, the national prestige and technological prowess of the Chinese. However, since 2005, the EU and Russia have both collaborated on this major project. Current collaboration is rather limited, concentrating on data sharing and tracking support. The EU should therefore consider further engaging itself scientifically and politically into this initiative and becoming a greater contributor to it.

A significant obstacle that has repeatedly been encountered in Sino-European space cooperation is the bilateral opacity of the governance of space programmes. On the European side, much work remains to be done in the definition of the respective roles of the EU and ESA, whereas on the Chinese side, the strong involvement of the military in space activities reflects somewhat negatively on their transparent governance.

Finally, the cooperation should also include dialogue on the evolution of the international space law framework. Free access to outer space and its peaceful and sustainable use are sure to become some of the most important security challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the moment, the international legal framework remains limited to a handful of UN-sponsored treaties and bilateral and multilateral disarmament treaties. China and the EU should foster a dialogue on the main issues that may shape future international law in this arena, including space debris, non-militarization and non-aggression. Examples, if not of cooperation then at least of parallel interests in this regard, include the Chinese-Russian proposed PPWT treaty of 2008 and its influence on the EU-proposed Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities (originally of 2008 and revised in 2010). The products of this cooperation in the field of space

law are not limited to binding instruments of international law, but could also take the form of TCBMs (Transparency- and Confidence-Building Measures).



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