

Workshop calls for space to be shared competence in EU constitution

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'If space is not mentioned in the treaty, does that mean that Europe doesn't have a space?' asked Jan Kolár, President of the Czech board for space activities.

Many stakeholders had hoped to see space listed as a shared competence in the EU constitution. Indeed, Jean-Luc Dehaene, Vice President of the European Convention said in March that he expected the document to refer explicitly to space, and claimed that 'Everybody recognises that if there is one area where Europe can only progress through the pooling of resources, this would be space.'

However, the draft constitution published on 28 May states only that: 'In the areas of research, technological development and space, the Union shall have competence to carry out actions, in particular to define and implement programmes; however, the exercise of that competence may not result in Member States being preventing from exercising theirs.'

In contrast, the preliminary draft constitution contained the more explicit reference to space to which Mr Dehaene alluded, listing the 'discovery of space' as one of the Union's objectives.

Head of Unit for space policy in the European Commission, Luc Tytgat, repeated on 2 June the Commission's view that 'space should be a shared competence of the EU,' and added that 'if the Convention could confirm that, it would be helpful.'

However, it may seem premature to identify competences in a constitution when, as yet, the new and closer relationship between the EU and the European Space Agency (ESA) has yet to be agreed.

'There is still something which is missing - a system which clearly defines the roles of the main stakeholders in the space environment,' said Mr Kolár.

Several speakers claimed that the need for a definition of the partnership between the EU and ESA is becoming more urgent with the approach of enlargement. 'The arrival of new Member States makes finding a policy more urgent. They need a coherent interface to find a new way to build on their substantial expertise,' said Reinhard Loosch, summing up at the Prague meeting.

Another opinion was, however, expressed by Eduard Kuznietsov, Deputy Director General of Ukraine's national space agency. While a supporter of integration, Mr Kuznietsov urged individual countries not to wait for political decisions before embarking on cooperation. 'Otherwise we will have to wait many years and run the risk of our European boat coming last,' he said.

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