Resolution 978 (1992)[1]

European space policy

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly has taken note of the resolutions adopted by the ministers of the member states of the European Space Agency (Munich, 19-20 November 1991) on ‘‘the European long-term space plan 1992-2005 and programmes"and on ‘‘programmes for observation of the Earth and its environment", and in particular of their decision to meet every year.

2. These resolutions, which reaffirm Europe's commitment to continue to develop an independent space capability, have nevertheless been conditioned by the new world space environment. This environment, which remained virtually unchanged between the establishment of the long-term plan in 1985 in Rome and its confirmation in 1987 in The Hague, has since undergone major upheavals, mainly because of the political changes in Europe.

3. Strategic considerations were of considerable importance in motivating the United States and the Soviet Union for the conquest of space. But prestige was the main object in this conquest and it played an important part in Europe as well. However, neither of these two reasons is today as important as it was for the justification of investment in space.

4. The Assembly feels that the broad guidelines of the European space policy should be decided on the basis of scientific and industrial motivations. It remains convinced that it is important for Europe to pursue its space policy objectives, and in particular the European long-term space plan, for the following reasons :

4.1. Europe has already acquired competences in the field of space which would be lost if there were to be any significant slowing down in the development of its space programme. Such loss of competence would be harmful for Europe at a time when the applications of space technologies play an increasingly important role in the social and economic development of our countries.

4.2. The continuation of space research makes a positive contribution to scientific progress, particularly in the fields of solid and fluid physics, human physiology, etc. In addition, it gives Europe the possibility of being present in the major exploration programmes which can only be achieved within the framework of co-operation at world level.

4.3. The long-term space plan is a corner-stone of the European technological community envisaged by the Single European Act.

4.4. The space programmes which contribute to give us a better knowledge of our environment will have the utmost importance for the future of our society.

4.5. Space technology ensures the training of high-level engineers and researchers which Europe will need to cope with the economic challenges of the twenty-first century. The commercial success of the European launching programmes shows Europe's capacity when it has the will to assert its identity as well as the economic advantage of its achievements.

1. Assembly debate on 6 February 1992 (25th Sitting) (see Doc. 6549, report of the Committee on Science and Technology, Rapporteurs : MM. Fourré and Lenzer). Text adopted by the Assembly on 6 February 1992 (25th Sitting).

The Assembly is convinced that those member states of the Council of Europe which are not members of the European Space Agency will also derive benefit, if indirectly, from the European space capability. In this connection it welcomes the fact that the ministers have emphasised ‘‘the need to ensure synergy between the Agency and the European Communities and between the Agency and other European organisations concerned while taking due account of their respective memberships and areas of responsibility".

It is important to set up close co-operation with the space organisations that will take over from the former Soviet programmes.

The Assembly approves the initiatives towards the setting up of a European satellite control agency and considers the decision of the Western European Union (WEU) to set up a satellite data interpretation centre to be a decisive step in that direction. It considers that the Convention of the European Space Agency allows it to take selective action in the field of Earth observation activities for the purpose of verification and monitoring of the application of disarmament agreements.

The Assembly declares its support for the idea of an independent capability for manned space flights for Europe and for the idea of using Earth observation programmes to obtain a better understanding of environmental problems. Manned flights must pursue major scientific and technological goals, and profitability, considered from every angle, must not be lost from sight. Constant attention will be given to any cost overruns by manned flight projects, in order not only to keep within the limits of member states' financial commitments, but particularly to avoid jeopardising other projects. It wishes to congratulate the European Space Agency on the launching and operation of Olympus, Giotto, Hipparcos, Meteosat, the Space Telescope, Ulysses and ERS-1, and to assure it of its political support.

In addition to the European Space Agency, national space agencies play an important role. These agencies should be encouraged to exchange their information and to co-ordinate their work in order to preserve complementarity and avoid duplication at European level.

The Assembly supports in general the decisions taken by the ministers of the member states of the European Space Agency at their meeting in Munich on 19 and 20 November 1991, which are in accordance with its own aims. The annual frequency of ministerial meetings should not however constitute any hindrance to the longer-term commitments required for execution of the space plan.

Long-term planning must offer adequate guarantees in respect of continuity and stability, so that the position and long-term planning of the research workers and undertakings concerned are not jeopardised. In addition, the Assembly urges the European Space Agency to pay special attention to the scientific and technological impact on its member states, particularly the smallest ones, of the ‘‘fair return" on their contributions.

It instructs its President to communicate this resolution to the Council and the Executive of the European Space Agency, as evidence of political support, on the widest geographical basis, for the European long-term space plan.