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SYNERGY FOR OUTER SPACE SUSTAINABILITY: ITU'S ROLE TODAY AND TOMORROW

Abstract

This paper analyses the growing concerns about the long-term sustainability of space activities from the perspective of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the UN's specialized agency for ICTs, and how the ITU Radiocommunication Sector can strengthen its impact in global governance of outer space. The paper will also address the importance of balancing the interests of new companies on the one hand, particularly those providing connectivity everywhere on land, while preserving existing space activities on the other hand, notably astronomy. This is relevant given that radio spectrum and associated orbits in outer space are limited natural resources to be accessed equitably by all states.

This paper will specifically assess the existing mechanisms supporting sustainability of space as laid in the Radio Regulations, as well as the ongoing development of mechanisms in the space sector by international actors. This study will draw a map of the roles and interactions of the main actors in sustainability of space to identify gaps and missing links.

The results show that the ITU has a specific, established and continuing role to play in maintaining and ensuring sustainability of space for all through its elaborate international mechanisms, such as the Radio Regulations and the World Radiocommunication Conferences.

The ITU can further increase and strengthen its contribution and impact on the sustainability of the outer space activities by, among others, including rules on satellite constellation deployment, end-of-life conditions, and more generally by establishing the exchange of best practices and lessons learned with other sectors for the management and monitoring of limited natural resources. These recommendations can reinforce other initiatives by fostering multistakeholder and multidisciplinary synergies and cooperation for a comprehensive global approach to the governance of sustainable activities in outer space tomorrow.