



**European Commission -
Speech**
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Keynote Address by Commissioner Kubilius to the European Space Agency Council

Brussels, 11 June 2025

Dear Heads of Delegation,

Dear Chair of the ESA Council,

Dear Director-General, dear Josef,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address you today.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you three key points:

- The broader geopolitical context for the defence and space portfolio
- The specific priorities for space
- Our cooperation with ESA

I have stated on many occasions that the 21st century is the century of space. Our economy is increasingly reliant on space-based systems and solutions.

The global space economy is growing with a fast pace. Europe must actively engage with this transformation to seize the opportunities it presents.

This is a pivotal year in Europe. We are working towards decisions that will shape space for the decade to come and beyond.

From the EU side, we are working towards a space package by the end of the month and immediately afterwards our proposals for the next EU budget. From the ESA side, you are working towards the ESA Ministerial Council in November.

It is imperative that together we can optimise the benefits for Europe.

But first, let us look at the broader geopolitical context.

Europe is at a turning point. Why? Because despite the fact, that we are not at war, we live in times of war.

And the perspective of war makes everything different. We need to put aside our peacetime glasses. That's why we now urgently need to get into shape.

We need to understand that between peace times and war times, there is a special defence readiness time. A time when intelligence services are warning, that aggression is possible, that war is possible.

A time when things need to start to move in a different direction than they were moving in peace time. Because this is the only way how we can deter aggression.

A few weeks ago, in Aachen, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made a very strong and convincing statement. That in these kinds of times we have two most important priorities: Pax Europaea and an Independent Europe.

Her message was very clear: If we want Peace in Europe (Pax Europaea) we need to be ready to be independent. As the Commission President put it: "We cannot allow ourselves to be thrown off course by the seismic changes that we are facing."

Pax Europaea (Peace in Europe) is our strategic responsibility. Pax Europaea is impossible without our independent defence readiness.

In my opinion we are facing a perfect storm in our security and defence readiness situation:

- War in Ukraine is continuing - without clear perspectives of peace. Putin does not want peace. And diplomacy will not help. Only - strength.
- Russian aggressiveness is increasing. Even if peace would be concluded in Ukraine, Putin will continue to mobilise Russia's war economy.
- And will plan his next aggression, as our intelligence services are warning us. This time - against the EU.
- The forthcoming American withdrawal from Europe and shifting towards Indo-Pacific is a new reality. This does not mean American withdrawal from NATO.
- Our readiness for defence is not sufficient. It demands an urgent ramp-up and a longer term strategy how to replace American capabilities in Europe.

Such a "perfect storm" means a deep defence crisis on the European continent. But as is often said - never waste a good crisis to take bold decisions and reforms.

That is what the "Defence White Paper" and "Rearm EU" program are about: how to make bold decisions and reforms in defence.

Second, in this stark geopolitical context, we need to realign our priorities for space.

We need Space for Defence and Defence of Space.

Today defence readiness is impossible without space readiness. We need:

- geointelligence data from space with all-weather imaging capabilities to revisit a precise spot on the earth each 30 minutes;
- secure satellite communications better than Starlink;
- secure high-precision navigation positioning and timing services, which are able to withstand jamming and spoofing

Those are capabilities crucial for the defence readiness in modern warfare.

And not only for defence readiness, since a lot of security in our civilian life depends on space services, for example: civil aviation or civil protection.

Some of those space services - crucial for defence readiness – exist at national level. However, they are not enough to address our collective needs as European. And they are not necessarily interoperable.

Some data can be provided by commercial space services. However, it is obvious that, for our resilience, we need to augment existing systems or develop new systems which will provide us with the most advanced space capabilities on the EU level.

And we can produce those space capabilities, as we did when, together with the European Space Agency, we created the world leading Galileo and Copernicus systems.

Now together with ESA we are implementing the new IRIS2 system for secure satellite communications, which will be operational by 2030.

But starting from this summer we shall have - as a precursor - the GOVSATCOM system, where we pool and share existing national assets.

Together with ESA we are working towards:

- a new positioning navigation and timing system in the Low Earth Orbit – the LEO PNT. It will add robustness to Galileo, notably for security-sensitive applications enabled through the Public Regulated Service (PRS).
- a new Earth Observation Governmental System. This is crucial for our capability to have very high resolution geointelligence data with a very high revisit. At times, as high as 30 minutes. Instead of only once a day, or less, which is the capability we have today.

All new systems need to come fast.

We also need to rethink our traditional space development methodology and adjust to the needs of our historical times. Building on our long heritage and existing capacities. In full coordination with our member states.

We are looking how to bring readiness not only into "space for defence", but also into "defence of space", into defence of our space assets, which are facing more and more threats directly in the satellite environment.

Defence readiness in space demands that we:

- regain our autonomous space transportation capabilities,
- to be able to permanently service our satellite systems directly in orbit,
- and also to be able to react and to defend our satellite systems from any physical threats in space.

This in turn means that we need to:

- strengthen our space situational awareness building on more than ten years of European cooperation towards EU Space Surveillance and Tracking services.
- work towards radio frequency interference monitoring

Access to space will be the backbone. The Commission is ready to assume political leadership towards a joint long-term vision. Together with member states and ESA.

Space is a new frontier. Materially and politically we need to be in space. Not least for our defence readiness and for our security.

This means European leadership and presence in orbital, cislunar or lunar economy.

This means working together. Resisting fragmentation.

And this brings me to my third point: cooperation between the European Union and ESA is of the essence.

ESA has valuable engineering expertise and is the trusted partner of the European Commission for the design, development and implementation of our programmes and in building our common vision looking to our longer-term future.

We also need to build on each other's strengths and complementarity.

Let me now share a few thoughts on the specific point of Earth Observation Governmental Service and European Resilience from Space (ERS).

The Commission has been working already since the last mandate in the preparation of synergies of space with security and defence. I am referring in particular to the EU process towards the European Space Strategy for Security and Defence.

The Earth observation governmental service is one of the initiatives that stems from this strategy. Moreover, Commission services have led two parallel industrial studies and have consulted member states on their needs through a dedicated ad hoc working group.

Building on this process, the Commission will now swiftly conclude this first phase with the preparation of a High-level User Requirements Document. This will be the synthesis of the ongoing work in the last years. It will be discussed and agreed with member states.

We expect this High-level User Requirements Document to be ready in the autumn and will constitute a political mandate towards ESA.

In parallel, we will work towards security requirements which may take a bit more time but we expect them to be ready in a year from now.

In our geopolitical context, we need to act fast and act together.

I have an excellent cooperation with the ESA Director-General. We have set up a joint task force. Our teams work closely so that we can optimise resources and link initiatives.

We meet regularly in order to advance this highly complex and highly needed political and programmatic agenda. To understand how to link our respective programmes in a seamless way in order to accelerate space in Europe. An outline of this analysis will be shared with member states in the near future.

I see a lot of value in the engineering proposals by ESA and especially on how to reform our space development methodology and act fast.

The ESA ministerial is an opportunity to mobilise funding in Europe already next year. And we need to do that in a smart way. In a way that will prepare the ground and plug into the next Earth Observation Governmental Service under the next EU programmatic cycle.

The ERS programme of ESA is, therefore, an important stepping stone towards the Earth Observation Governmental Service. It will allow Europe to start now, we cannot wait.

This cooperation can also allow us to build on developments supported by the Next Generation EU Recover and Resilience Facility and the respective national plans.

To conclude:

In our complex geopolitical times, we need to act fast, accelerate our pace and build up capacity under the European Union's political leadership in full concertation with member states and using all our intellectual capacities.

It is indeed imperative that we seize all major funding decisions Europe has this year to proceed with a concerted plan to accelerate our future.

Our strength is our unity!

I look forward to seeing you all in person next week at the celebratory event for ESA's 50th anniversary.

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