

Space Strategy For Europe

[A Space Strategy for Europe](#) was issued last week by the European Commission (EC), based around four strategic goals.

- Maximising the Benefits of Space for Society and the European Union (EU) Economy
- Fostering a Globally Competitive & Innovative European Space Sector
- Reinforcing Europe's Autonomy In Accessing & Using Space In a Secure & Safe Environment
- Strengthening Europe's Role as a Global Actor & Promoting International Co-operation

The strategy began with a heartening assessment of the European space economy, recognising that it supports almost a quarter of million jobs and is valued at around €50 bn.

The Earth observation (EO) sector is strongly represented within the document, particularly in the first two goals. Whilst some of the references to EO are fairly obvious statements, there are also some intriguing comments.

Maximising the Benefits of Space for Society and the EU Economy

This goal identifies a significant untapped potential for the uptake of space services and data, and outlines a number of actions that will be taken to unlock this; including:

- Encouraging the use of space services and data, wherever they provide effective solutions – the last part provides an interesting test.
- Ensuring EU legislation will be supportive of the uptake of these services.
- Provision of improved access to, and exploitation of, Copernicus data – anyone who has tried to access data will know the need for continued improvement. Improving interconnectivity with other data infrastructures and other datasets.
- Define clear limits between free Copernicus core information services and commercial applications – hopefully this will show Copernicus services as an opportunity rather than a threat; something that is currently unclear for, particularly SME, businesses.

Overall, the strategy states this will open up new business opportunities, including for SME's and start-ups. We're supportive of these actions, however we also have concerns.

The document has a single line stating it will reach out to new users and connect downstream activities to non-space sectors. This is the holy grail for every EO commercial organisation, and very few have come close to achieving it. The minimal statement potentially suggests the EC is fundamentally underestimating how difficult this will be.

An intriguing element is the intention "to introduce an 'industry test' to check downstream

suppliers can provide reliable and affordable services.” We’d support any quality accreditation, but it will be interesting to see whether this is a certification scheme for everyone or a barrier to market for SMEs and start-ups.

This issue was strongly debated at a European Space Agency (ESA) meeting last week, particularly over the question as to whether the accrediting body assumes liability when a service doesn’t deliver. It is worth noting that the [European Association of Remote Sensing Companies](#) (EARSC) has an existing certification scheme for management practices, but only a few organisations have gone through the process to date.

Fostering a Globally Competitive & Innovative European Space Sector

This goal focuses on supporting research and development within the space economy, together with promoting entrepreneurship and business opportunities.

It specifically references the launch of a dedicated sector skills alliance for space/Earth observation – which sounds great. However, it appears to be a committee of stakeholders to discuss the necessary skills requirements for the industry, and so it is not clear what it will actually do.

The Commission also aims to support space entrepreneurs, start-ups and SME’s through a variety of programmes, dialogues and synergies! Lots of good words used with little clarity of real action.

Reinforcing Europe’s Autonomy In Accessing & Using Space In a Secure & Safe Environment

This goal has a focus on ensuring that Europe has the infrastructure and capacity to operate in space freely; although this does seem slightly at odds with the international co-operation trumpeted in the final goal.

However, the most interesting element for the EO community is the statement that the radio frequency spectrum must be protected from interference from other systems. This is something that is vital for space sector, but falls short of guaranteeing space technology having access to radio frequencies. In recent times, there has been a threat to the microwave frequencies from the requirements of mobile phone and wifi networks.

Strengthening Europe’s Role as a Global Actor & Promoting International Co-operation

The final strategic goal highlights the importance of international co-operation and the desire for the EU to have a much greater global lead. Given that the EU has the second largest public space budget in the world, this emphasis is welcomed.

It also notes that the EU will contribute to initiatives including the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) and the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS).

Summary



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Like all strategies there are lots of good intentions within these words, but limited practical details. It won't be until the detailed plans are drawn up to implement these actions that we will be able to determine whether this document is a valuable step forward for the space economy in Europe, or a thirteen page missed opportunity.

Our Footnote for the UK

The strategy makes clear the EU & ESA will be key to the delivery of this strategy, and so we can't comment without mentioning the Brexit word. The current plan is that the UK will be out of the EU in early 2019, and therefore the UK Government's input to the upcoming ESA ministerial is absolutely critical, alongside decisions on how we'll interact with the Copernicus program.

We need to give a strong and positive commitment to our ongoing involvement with ESA, without this the UK's space economy will face a significant setback. Everyone within the community must ensure that the Government, and Ministers, are fully aware of the importance of this in the coming weeks.