



# General Assembly

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## Open-ended working group on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours

Geneva, 9 – 13 May 2022

Item 5 of the agenda

### General exchange of views

## European Union (EU) joint contributions to the works of the Open-Ended Working Group on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours

### Part one: Scoping

#### Submitted by the European Union

1. The EU and its Member States are actively engaged in promoting the preservation of a safe, secure and sustainable space environment and the peaceful use of outer space on an equitable and mutually acceptable basis for all, for present and future generations.
2. The EU and its Member States welcome the adoption of UNGA Resolution 76/231 entitled “Reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours”, which is a timely step to contribute to the reduction of threats and risks related to outer space. The establishment of this Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG), which the EU and its Member States fully support, paves the way for a detailed discussion on reducing threats through responsible behaviours with a view to concretely improving space security and to contribute to the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which is essential for strengthening international security and stability. This is especially important in a context where many of the systems and services that are today essential for well-being as well as security depend directly or indirectly on space.
3. The EU and its Member States contributed to the UN Secretary-General report with a joint EU contribution and several national contributions. We welcome the numerous other contributions to the report, which show the commitment of United Nations Member States and relevant organisations to address the issue of reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours.
4. The EU and its Member States consider the establishment of this OEWG as a further step in a pragmatic and cooperative process, involving all UN Member States, which aims to reach “a common understanding of how best to act to reduce threats to space systems in order to maintain outer space as a peaceful, safe, stable and sustainable environment, free from an arms race and conflict, for the benefit of all”. The EU and its Member States entirely support this process as we entirely supported the resolution.
5. The EU and its Member States also consider the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach, encouraging the attendance of other international organisations, commercial actors and civil society representatives, in accordance with established practice.



6. The EU and its Member States will further contribute to the work of the Open-Ended Working Group by submitting joint EU contributions to the issues discussed in the OEWG.

## **Strategic context and space environment**

7. The space environment is becoming increasingly congested, contested and competitive. Outer space is an area where we have seen a considerable amount of challenges to our security in recent years and it merits our full attention. The destruction of space objects and systems or interruptions of their services significantly impacts and disrupts connected societies which are increasingly dependent on these services.

8. Furthermore, the dual-use nature of many space objects and systems poses challenges when it comes to protecting space assets and identifying threats, distinguishing between innocuous behaviours and potentially threatening ones. For instance, technologies allowing in-orbit rendezvous operations and proximity/docking operations can be used for activities such as active debris removal or on-orbit servicing. Non-transparent rendezvous operations and proximity operations may however also be perceived as a threat and be (mis-)understood as hostile actions, since they can also be used to disrupt the operation of other satellite or to destroy or de-orbit them, and a State may not know the intention associated with the manoeuvre.

9. Further, the rapid growth of human space activity, coupled with the increased diversity of space operators, makes it ever more necessary to further develop international norms and standards, guidelines, best practices, principles of responsible behaviour and other transparency and confidence-building measures governing human activity in space, while ensuring compliance with existing international law and transparency and confidence building measures.

10. It is thus urgent and in the interest of all States to pragmatically and immediately improve space security and to act swiftly in order to agree on a global, common and multilateral solution through greater coordination and cooperation.

11. The EU and its Member States reiterate the importance of the mutually reinforcing role of transparency and confidence-building measures, reducing the risks of misperception, miscalculation, and unintended conflict escalation, and the need to advocate for responsible behaviour in outer space.

## **EU engagement and commitment**

12. The EU and its Member States regard outer space as a global commons, to be used for the benefit of all. The 1967 Outer Space Treaty and other applicable international law, including the UN Charter, as well as guiding principles developed in the UN framework constitute the cornerstone of the global governance of outer space. The EU and its Member States stress the importance of conducting space activities in accordance therewith.

13. Norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours should be considered across the full range of space activities in order to promote security, safety and sustainability in outer space and to safeguard the long-term use of the space environment for peaceful purposes. On the safety and sustainability side, the EU and its Member States welcome the progress achieved in COPUOS with the adoption of the Long-Term Sustainability Guidelines and the present and future related work.

14. The EU and its Member States emphasise that any future legally binding framework in the scope of space security should be effective, should be verifiable and should cover all relevant threats, be they Earth-to-space, space-to-space, or space-to-Earth.

15. The EU and its Member States also emphasise the importance of transparency and confidence-building measures as central to further strengthening the existing normative framework.

16. Globally-shared principles of responsible behaviour contribute to increase international cooperation in space, commit to mutual non-interference in the peaceful exploration and use of outer space, facilitate an equitable access to outer space and increase transparency and confidence in the conduct of space activities.

17. The EU and its Member States consider it important to jointly pursue and intensify efforts to address challenges in outer space, with the involvement of all UN Member States and relevant organisations. As firm believers in multilateralism with a strong United Nations at its core, the EU and its Member States consider that this is best achieved through international cooperation and collaboration. The EU and its Member States therefore continue to be fully committed to engage constructively in discussions on the prevention of threats in outer space.

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