European Union [Original: English] [10 February 2017]

The European Union and its member States consider resolution 70/53 on transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities, adopted by the General Assembly on 7 December 2015, to be an important instrument for the promotion and strengthening of international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes.

In line with this resolution, the European Union and its member States continue to promote the preservation of a safe and secure space environment and the peaceful use of outer space on an equitable and mutually acceptable basis. The European Union recognizes outer space as a global common good, to be used for the benefit of mankind.

The European Union and its member States are increasingly important users of outer space. The European Union has developed two ambitious programmes, Galileo and Copernicus, which complement national space programmes and provide services free of charge that can contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. The European Union also benefits from space programmes of its member States and the European Space Agency. Furthermore, European space actors increasingly engage in international cooperation to help other countries to mobilize space for their sustainable development.

Our new space strategy for Europe, issued in October 2016, sets out Europe’s ambitions in space and confirms that we remain an active and globally engaged partner. On the basis of the values and principles enshrined in United Nations treaties, the European Union will work alongside its member States and partners to promote and protect the sustainable and peaceful use of outer space by all nations. The European Union’s new global strategy of June 2016 reconfirms this commitment.

We remain convinced that transparency and confidence-building measures can make an important contribution to the security, safety and sustainability of activities in outer space. The European Union therefore proposed some years ago an international code of conduct for outer space activities, a fact that was also noted in resolution 70/53. It should be recalled, in this context, that efforts to pursue political commitments, such as a multilateral code of conduct to encourage responsible actions in and the peaceful use of outer space, were also endorsed by the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space Activities, which the Secretary General convened in 2012 in accordance with General Assembly resolution 65/68.

On this basis, the European Union formally presented its proposal for an international code of conduct for outer space activities in Vienna in June 2012 and subsequently held three rounds of open-ended consultations on this draft text (Kiev in May 2013, Bangkok in November 2013 and Luxembourg in May 2014), which attracted very broad international participation and support. A meeting was therefore convened at Headquarters in New York in July 2015 at the initiative of the European Union, with the assistance of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, entitled “Multilateral negotiations on an international code of conduct for outer space activities”. The meeting was very well attended, with delegations from 109 States and 8 intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. We regret that negotiations could not commence after so many years of consultations, but we remain convinced that the rich and
substantial discussions in New York, both on the substance and on the process, constituted an important milestone and will help the international community to move forward.

The growth in the amount of human space-activity, coupled with the increased diversity of space operators, makes it both more complicated and more necessary to develop new norms and rules governing human activity in space. The European Union therefore calls for increased international cooperation that should help us to establish agreed standards of responsible behaviour in outer space. The European Union continues to believe that a non-legally binding agreement negotiated within the United Nations could be a way to proceed.

Globally shaped principles of responsible behaviour across the full range of space activities should serve long-term goals: to increase international cooperation in space, to commit mutually to debris avoidance and to non-interference in the peaceful exploration and use of outer space and to facilitate the equitable access to outer space and increase transparency in the conduct of space activities. The European Union and its member States will continue to show commitment in these areas, which are important to our security and our prosperity.

The European Union commends the members and the Chair of the Working Group on the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space for their excellent work and the tangible progress achieved. In June 2016, the Committee broadly agreed to move ahead with a first set of guidelines while requesting the Working Group to continue to consider the remaining guidelines. Further progress was made at the intersessional meeting of the Working Group in September 2016. The European Union and its member States welcome these positive developments and will continue to fully support the process.