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Italian, German and French Cooperation in Aerospace

Why European unity in aerospace matters for defense and innovation

3 Main Points

Technology is complex. European space launches have faced setbacks. But what does space really need to be successful?

About the Author



Diana holds academic backgrounds in Political Science and History, with a Master's focus in Economic History. Her research centers on (post-)Soviet history, a subject deeply connected to her personal family history of deportation by the Red Army. As a multilingual scholar and a vocal advocate for diversity and equality, she brings a strong commitment to inclusion in academic and professional settings. Diana is currently pursuing her third degree and works as a student assistant at the Cyber Innovation Hub of the Bundeswehr, the innovation unit of the German armed forces.

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Technology is complex – just like the American space industry, such as SpaceX. European launches have also faced setbacks. But what does space really need to be successful? As representatives of the research alumni community, three EPIS members had the opportunity to gain insights into space, start-ups, defence innovation, and international relations by attending the discussion titled “Italian, German, and French Cooperation in Aerospace: Challenges and Opportunities.” To clarify, the start-ups and defence innovation discussed were specifically related to the space sector.

Returning to the evening seminar, organized by the Italian Embassy in Berlin, it was a unique opportunity to engage directly with space industry experts, facilitated by the EPIS Think Tank. The seminar took place on March 24, 2025, and was a collaborative effort between the Italian Embassy and EPIS. We were welcomed by the ambassadors of France and Italy in Germany, followed by keynote speeches from Col. Domenico Antonacci (Chief of Space Capability Development, Italian Air Force) and Brig. Gen. Jürgen Schrödl (German Army – Space Operations). Both introduced the audience to current space capabilities. A panel discussion followed, featuring speakers including Marie-Christine von Hahn (CEO, BDLI – German Aerospace Industries Association), Sabine von der Recke (OHB System AG), Giuseppe Adrion (Leonardo Space Division), Klaus Michel, and Oliver Dubroeuq—representing four different companies. One key takeaway was the reminder that “the final discussion should always be with the customer.”



It was during this seminar that someone stated that Europe is "not suitable for some moments." But what does that really mean? The remark likely reflects concerns that Europe is falling behind in areas such as space technology, AI development, and private sector innovation. Fortunately, several recommendations were made on how to overcome these challenges. Among them, reducing regulatory barriers, improving coordination in funding structures, and addressing weaknesses in political and governmental frameworks. The importance of "special skills to drive progress" was also emphasized.

So, what kind of special skills are required? First and foremost, Europe needs to ensure a competitive and robust space market. This includes collaboration between large and small companies, the development of technologically mature ecosystems, and enhancing global competitiveness. Working at a faster pace was also considered essential. However, one speaker countered by stating that the German and broader European space industries are already on a "high level" and are growing rapidly. Recent developments such as Ariane 6 and the Arctic Weather Satellite were cited. Still, space remains a complex domain. One major challenge is that Germany and Europe often lack access to the critical materials needed for transformative industrial shifts.

While increasing work speed and collaboration are often promoted as solutions, speakers cautioned that "the industry cannot move faster than the customer." Another important point raised was Europe's "tight link to sovereignty"—a concept that underscores concerns about Europe's strategic autonomy in the space domain. As global competition intensifies, especially in launch technologies and AI, Europe must define its own path. However, the future remains uncertain. What's needed now is trust, strategic vision, and appropriate regulation.

Defence was also a key theme—not just protection, but also proactive capability development. Success in space is directly linked to national security, encompassing technologies such as air defence systems, drones, and robotics. This discussion served as a reminder of the critical role



defence companies play in shaping Europe's space future. This led to the final major question: What can Europe do in times of geopolitical instability, such as the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, to secure its safety?

One answer, emphasized particularly by speakers from France, was the importance of partnership strategies in securing both sovereignty and resilience. Several important questions about the future remain unanswered. In the United States, the new presidential term under Donald Trump brought a shift in political priorities. As the speakers emphasized, space-related negotiations with the U.S. should not be overlooked in governmental agendas. On the contrary, Europe should aim to compete with the United States in this strategically critical domain. For some, the question may arise: Why must Europe compete with the U.S.? During the panel, a presentation clearly illustrated that Europe's space budget is eight times smaller than that of the U.S., with an investment of only €26 per citizen. This highlights the need for greater support of start-ups and private innovation.

The seminar organized by the Italian Embassy in Berlin brought together experts from the space, defence, and start-up sectors. Discussions focused on how to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and sovereignty in space, including calls for reduced regulation, better collaboration between companies, and improved political coordination. Speakers emphasized that while Europe is making progress, it still faces challenges in areas such as funding, access to critical materials, and strategic autonomy. The event concluded with a strong message: Europe must forge stronger international partnerships and maintain a careful balance between cooperation and competition with the United States.