

Wednesday, 9 July 2008 - Strasbourg

Space and security (debate)

Ana Maria Gomes, on behalf of the PSE Group . - (PT) Mr President, I congratulate our fellow member, Karl von Wogau, on this report and on the tireless way in which he has supported the deepening of the European project through the construction of a European defence policy. The report strikes an appropriate balance between what should be the main objectives of a European policy in the field of space and security. First, the capital importance of using all diplomatic and political channels to prevent the weaponisation of space, as emphasised by Commissioner Verheugen, so that space can continue to be used as a public asset for all humanity. Second, to equip Europe with the policies, financial resources and equipment needed to ensure its strategic autonomy on the international stage.

With regard to the first objective, it is important to emphasise that we are not talking here about the use of space for military ends. We know that, from the beginning of space exploration, satellites have been used to support the armed forces of various countries in the area of communications. Some of our fellow Members persist in confusing this type of operation, which is compatible with international law, with recent attempts by some, especially the United States, to put arms into space and transform it into a fourth battlefield, in addition to land, sea and air. It is such warlike strategies and other unacceptable initiatives, such as China's anti-satellite test in January 2007, that must be combated.

The report responds to these threats by seeking a pro-active diplomatic role for the European Union. It is Europe's task to lead a global strategy that seeks to equip the international community with an effective legal architecture that guarantees the total exclusion of arms from space, through the revision and strengthening of the Outer Space Treaty.

With regard to the second objective, the report warns against neglecting the crucial importance of space for Europe's strategic autonomy. As the Galileo project showed, an overwhelming majority of MEPs believe that sharing financial and technological resources and equipment among Europeans is the only way for Europe to avoid dependence on the United States, Russia and China for vital strategic activities, such as navigation.

The report also underlines the importance, frequently ignored or feared, of Galileo and other European national programmes for a serious common foreign and security policy. Without the peaceful and effective use of space, our economies, transport systems and meteorology and our whole way of life would be impossible. Europe must think strategically about this important area, in the same way as Washington, Beijing and Moscow do. Think and act. It is with this in mind that I very much regret that the Council Presidency is not here for this debate.