

9th Annual Conference on European Space Policy
Brussels, 25 January 2017 at 9:00
Palais d'Egmont

Speech of VP Maroš Šefčovič

- Check against delivery -

Minister Reynders,

Members of European Parliament,

And representatives of Europe's space
community,

Throughout the year I meet regularly with many of you on an ad-hoc basis, but this annual conference is an excellent opportunity for me to see all of you under the same roof, for us to reflect together, what we've accomplished, and where we are headed.

As we all know, 2016 was quite a rich year for Europe's space community in general, and especially when it comes to our own EU space projects.

- 6 Galileo satellites were launched
- 2 sentinel Copernicus satellites were launched
- The initial services of Galileo were finally announced.

But beyond these specific accomplishments, each of which deserves an entire speech, we finally have a European space strategy. I know that you held long discussions about the strategy yesterday, so I will not go into too much detail. What is important for me to stress is that our space policies are now anchored in a clear vision for the upcoming years. We have a strong sense of direction and we know how and when we would like to get there.

The need for such a strategy might seem obvious to some of you but it was not at all

obvious when we started discussing this Strategy. I therefore think we can all be proud that for the first time we have a strategic document on the table which moreover is the result of a very inclusive process which involved all stakeholders from industry to national space agencies.

The Strategy has already been broadly welcomed by our partners at ESA, national space agencies, industry, many MEPs and the Council.

The European Parliament and the Council will now discuss the strategy in the coming months in more detail. I am looking forward to these exchanges and hope that we will get their position as soon as possible and in time for the preparation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU. The Commission intends to make a proposal before the end of this year.

We are honoured by the presence of Minister Reynders in the room today. Belgium is not only the host country to the EU institutions and this conference. Belgium also has a significant budget in the field of space, - the 5th biggest in the EU as I understand -, and it has one of the best ambassadors for space that we have in Europe with Frank De Winne, the Belgian astronaut who is able to fascinate every audience.

There is no political ambition without the necessary funding. At the same time, we will have many competing new priorities for the next MFF at EU level and moreover a new context after the British referendum.

Minister Reynders knows this better than many others given his previous experience as finance minister and his current role in EU foreign policy.

I think we both know how important it is to make the case for space and its economic and political benefits for our citizens in many sectors of the economy and many different policy areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that we can make this case.

I often speak about Europe's ambition to lead the 4th industrial revolution, to digitise our services, to decarbonise our economy, to fight climate change, to make the great technological leap forward. All this is linked in the end to our ambition to create jobs and growth for the people in Europe.

I do not need to tell the people in this room, the tremendous role of space in this endeavour. You know it better than I do. But I can assure

you that my colleagues and I repeat this message also on other fora which are not dedicated to space.

The Commission remains your ally in advancing Europe's space industry. I think this was underlined already by my colleagues Elżbieta Bieńkowska and Federica Mogherini. We will do our part to make sure you enjoy the environment to perform, to encourage the uptake of our space programmes, and to be a strong global space player.

On the same token, we are also a demanding client. I mentioned our space programs earlier and the major milestones they have made in the recent months. But it is also no secret that space programs regularly face challenges and problems. I would therefore like to send a strong message to you, to the entire space community: we have to be rigorous,

accountable and reliable in fixing problems. But most of all, we have to work together. This is what matters for the success of the programs. We need all of you at your best, no less.

I have another request to make from you. It's not enough that you become the best space industry in the world; we need to better tell your story, our story.

We, in this room, all know that the space technologies are critical for a wide range of urgent issues, be them: fighting climate change, securing borders, providing humanitarian aid, smartening our telecommunication services, financial services, I can go on and on. But we need to make sure that this story also leaves this room and reaches common European citizens.

You might have noticed that I have engaged in quite a few communication exercises on space

in recent months. I try to do it in an innovative way with new technologies and new formats like using virtual reality or social media. I do so because I think we have an excellent story to tell, a European story which inspires the people in Europe and beyond. We need such excellent stories and we need to tell them more often. Europe needs good news and good stories – more than ever!

I therefore ask you to challenge yourselves to demonstrate the dynamics of the space sector: your new applications, new ideas, new innovation. We need global champions, SMEs and start-ups in Europe. They generate jobs, growth, investment and innovation for all of us in Europe. Europe is stronger and safer thanks to space. This message is more relevant than ever in the current geopolitical context.

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Let me conclude by saying that the major space successes of the past 50 years are due to our ability to join forces among the Member States and their national space agencies, with ESA, with the space industry and the EU. We can think of all the reasons why this should never work but it actually does work quite well.

I'd therefore like to thank you for these successes and encourage you to continue in this European spirit. If we want a strong Europe in space we must combine our respective strengths, many of which are represented here today.

We cannot afford to fall behind other actors and new competitors in this domain. Together we must do whatever it takes to remain in the first rank, building on our talent and expertise, capitalising on our investments and seizing the new opportunities space will offer.

There is still a lot of work ahead of us. I have mentioned the discussions on the strategy with Parliament and Council; the MFF and the first steps to implement the strategy. In 2017, we will also present as mid-term evaluation of the Galileo and Copernicus programmes. These will set the first features of the new governance structure and financing of the programmes. We also need to prepare the new regulations, whilst still completing the deployment of our infrastructures with new launches planned for this year.

Let us – together – make sure that 2017 will also be remembered as another decisive milestone for Europe in space.