

*Étude*

**To boldly go where no one has gone before:  
the Development of a European Space Strategy  
(ESS)**

Thomas Hoerber

---

*PhD, MPhil, Lecturer, Department of Political Science & Department of  
History, University of Victoria (Canada)*

---

**The case and the scope for a ESS**

In the last essay on “The past and future purpose of European integration”, it was suggested that the early, essential, ideals of peace and prosperity have been to a large extent fulfilled. And that, therefore, the development of a European Space Strategy could well have the potential of giving the European integration process new impetus, which in turn might provide some of the driving force which the original ideals of peace and prosperity used to have for Europe<sup>1</sup>. This rationale is based on what may seem a somewhat naïve assumption that we do actually have power to decide what to do with the energy surplus that has apparently accrued from the European integration effort and that now seems to be available in Europe, but in want of useful employment. Against this background, it was suggested that there should be a preference for an outreaching and creative direction for future activities under the European integration umbrella and that the proposed European Space Strategy could be a suitable vehicle for this idea. The argument is based on the conviction that it is not sufficient for the governments and the European institutions simply to mark time and administer the achievements of the past were it only because such has never been the nature of European

---

1. See T. Hoerber, “The nature of the Beast: An essay on the past and future purpose of European integration”, in: *L'Europe en formation*, 1/2006, subheading IV.

integration. A purely passive policy would, from this perspective, betray the internal dynamism which has brought Europe to its present high level of achievement<sup>2</sup>.

However, there are a number of building blocks of past European integration efforts which can be taken as guidelines for future integration. Each step of the European integration process seems to have had two major components: a political vision and a concrete application. An example of such a step with two such components the establishment of peaceful cooperation between France and Germany under the first European integration initiatives and the concrete implementation of this objective in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) with the integration of their coal and steel industries in order to make any future confrontation – as outlined in the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950 – “materially impossible<sup>3</sup>”. Given the incontestable achievement of economic advancement and the resulting economic strength of today’s European Union (EU), it does not seem unreasonable to argue that the European economies could support a space programme, though immensely costly. However, perhaps more importantly than the financial implications, a European Space Strategy would combine the two factors outlined above for all the major European integration initiatives: vision and practical implementation. It is a vision for the future of European integration and would find its concrete application in a space programme facilitated under the ESS. Therefore, as with earlier European integration initiatives, it should offer the potential to propel Europe forward – deliberately leaving open the final destination of the integration process<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, exactly as with previous integration efforts, closer integration between the Member States seems to be the logical outcome<sup>5</sup>.

---

2. One of the most commonly used metaphors for the internal dynamism of the European integration process came from Walter Hallstein, first president of the EEC Commission, who liked to compare the integration process to a man on a bicycle – if he stopped, he fell off.

3. See A. G. Harryvan, J. van der Harst (eds.) *Documents on the European Union*, Macmillan Press, London, 1997, p. 62, see also, Schuman (MRP), Foreign Minister, in JO, 1<sup>re</sup> Lég., 24/11/49, p. 6234I, JO, 1<sup>re</sup> Lég., 25/7/50, p. 5943II, see also, Pleven (UDSR), President of the Council, in JO, 1<sup>re</sup> Lég., 25/10/50, p. 7220II.

4. See T. Hoerber, ‘The Nature of the Beast: An essay on the past and future purpose of European integration’, subheadings II and IV.

5. As this essay is not meant to analyse the merits of the European integration process, I ignore the question as to whether European integration is actually a “good thing” or a “bad thing”, nor do I attempt to make the pro-European integration case here. My theme is the merits of one future strategy for integration – the ESS – assuming that European integration is in fact beneficial to its participants.

In addition, the old guiding principles of peace and prosperity also offer some indication of a sensible choice of new themes that can take European integration into the future. While the internal objective of prosperity used to be clearly reflected in the *economic* integration process, e.g. the ECSC and the EEC, peace as the external objective found its expression in the early political and military integration efforts, such as the abortive European Defence Community (EDC), the Western European Union (WEU) and also in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Even though neither the WEU nor NATO were fully-fledged supranational institutions along the lines of the ECSC and the EEC – most successful in economic integration – such organisations were clearly more than old-fashioned alliances and served the objective of peace for a very similar constituency of member states as those in the exclusively European, supranational institutions. All these institutions, including NATO, had, despite their military nature, the defensive purpose written in their charters. They can, therefore, after the end of the Cold War arguably be seen as having achieved the almost universally accepted objective of peace, although only through the application of mutual nuclear terror at the time. Perhaps more importantly all these European institutions built political trust between their members and therefore gave peace between them a solid foundation. This achievement was by no means an inevitable outcome or even a reality in the early years of European integration. Having argued that these institutions have achieved their objectives of peace and prosperity and with the Cold War now in the past so that peace is genuinely a reality for the member states of the European Union, we may now suggest that it is time to look for new objectives, externally and internally, for the Union in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Internally, a consolidation process already seems to be under way. The question of the borders of Europe is now arising increasingly frequently, which suggests that the territorial consolidation of Europe is coming more and more to the forefront of political thinking<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, the project of a European Constitution, although rejected in its current version, is another indication that Europe is also consolidating itself as a law- and rule-based polity. Thus, consolidation seems to be the key term to characterise the internal objective of the EU in the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>7</sup>. This

---

6. See for example Trond Berg Eriksen, "The European Self-Image", in: J. Peter Burgess (ed.), *Cultural Politics and Political Culture in Postmodern Europe*, Postmodern Studies 24, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1997, pp. 111-117.

7. "Consolidation" will be the topic of a later essay dealing with this subject in more detail.

paper will, however, deal with an external objective which seems to suggest itself now that the elimination of armed conflict in Europe may be regarded as an *acquis*, that is, space exploration, with its concrete application in the European Space Strategy.

### **Why Space and why in a European Framework?**

To start off with an obvious point, space exploration has the outreach potential as opposed to predominantly inward looking policies, such as welfare or environmental policy, the merit of which is not doubted by this paper, but are by the same token not the chosen subject of it. Therefore, space exploration would reflect the creative dynamism of the European integration process. It also has the potential to bring the European partners closer together, because there is little doubt that space exploration will be difficult and will certainly not be cheap. Another parallel can be drawn with the past objective of peace or rather with the concerted military effort in the West to guarantee its security. More particularly, in the build-up of the Western defences, it was recognised early on that the standardisation of weapon systems and supplies was desirable<sup>8</sup>. At the time, each national army had its own equipment. The nations, Britain in particular, were reluctant to go ahead with standardisation. A closer look at the supply routes of weaponry shows why. In all countries except West Germany, there was a national arms industry in the 1950s when such ideas were first mooted in the framework of common European defence arrangements. Any change to the national nature of the armament industry had implications for national employment as well as for national pride. Neither of these considerations could be lightly ignored by any government. In addition, because of the complex techniques of production used in this industry, any change along the lines of standardisation was not necessarily in the hands of ministers, but rather in those of the engineers, who did not usually work together across national borders, especially in such a secretive industry. The consequence was that in order for standardisation to work there would have to be coordination of national arms industries *below* the government level, and this has never been realised in any comprehensive fashion. Hence, a satisfactory degree of standardisation of weapon systems has never been achieved in Europe. Furthermore, fears of economic espionage – even among the Western allies – strengthened the hostility to

---

8. See Eden (Con), Foreign Secretary, in Hansard 1953-54, 520, c. 313-4.

standardisation and, indeed, the closer military integration sought by the proponents of the EDC. Moreover, the aggravated Soviet threat in the early 1950s further heightened the urgency of rearmament, leaving little time for the complex coordination procedures between national industries that would have been needed to achieve effective standardisation, and militating in favour of purely national efforts in this field<sup>9</sup>. Hence, the national perspective remained dominant in the field of armaments and the main question was who was to set a standard for future European standardisation and for all the European partner armies. Britain, with its well-established and experienced arms industry, thought itself in a good position to do that for the rest of Europe. In that sense, standardisation was considered a great idea for Britain, if it was *British* standards which were to be followed – a rationale very similar in all those countries in the Western camp with an arms industry capable of supplying more than only their own national forces, notably France and the USA. Instead of collaboration and standardisation, there was often quite fierce competition between the armament industries of the Western allies. To put it more positively and to use Britain as an example, again, the maintenance of an oversized arms industry at home was a specific British policy objective, probably most prominently pronounced under Churchill's peacetime government. In very real terms, Britain wanted its share of the rearmament spending under way in all West European states, in particular in West Germany, at the height of the Cold War<sup>10</sup>.

The argument of reticence or limited capacity for collaboration in the arms industry applies to a considerable extent in the field of nuclear research and national nuclear programmes as well, in particular, where governments planned to build a nuclear industry that could support a nuclear armament programme, as in France from the mid-1950s onwards. Against this background Jean Monnet became one of the leading advocates of the European integration initiative in the nuclear field – Euratom. A major aspect of its appeal lay in the fact that it was “new”. “New” was good in the sense that no old structures had to be broken up, no vested interests had to be appeased and, therefore, the nuclear field seemed to provide an opportunity to try out Monnet's supranational European model in virgin territory, so that Monnet could hope that for the first time this approach could develop its full potential without prior

---

9. Jeffreys (Con.), in Hansard 1950, 478, c. 1035, Ward (Lab.), in Hansard 1950, 478, c. 1064-5, see also, Bennet (Con.), in Hansard 1950, 478, c. 1276, see also, Armed Forces Equipment Standardisation, in Hansard 1950-51, 487, c. 1007.

10. J.R.H. Hutchinson (Con.), in Hansard 1953-54, 533, c. 394-5.

prejudice. Together the European peoples would have all the resources needed to catch up with the nuclear superpowers<sup>11</sup>. These hopes were thwarted – Monnet suggests – by France’s selfish attachment to a national nuclear armament programme which led Guy Mollet – then Socialist head of government – to deprive the Euratom project of the integration spirit, leaving the other five European partners – Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries – high and dry on another French integration initiative eventually blocked by France, the rejection of the EDC being the most flagrant example of France’s failure to deliver on its own highflying integration initiatives<sup>12</sup>. The constraints the French nuclear armament programme placed on French nuclear research centres, production facilities, and their engineers and scientists in their cooperation with the European partners illustrate the way in which economic and technical integration below the government level was prevented.

Nonetheless, Monnet’s argument still stands that the supranational model is best applied in areas in which technological breakthrough opens up new fields of activity, provided that it does not touch on national sensitivities as outlined above. A space programme at the cutting edge of technological development manifestly fits the description. A European Space Strategy has never featured very high either on the agenda of any individual European Member State or, indeed, on the agenda of “Europe” itself, which takes out the one caveat of “national sensitivities”. The institutional consequence of this latchkey role space programmes have played in national and European politics is that the European Space Agency (ESA) is still confined to the periphery of the European setup, in institutional terms, being firmly situated outside of the EU institutional structures. In the ESA, as in so many other intergovernmental institutions, the best common denominator acceptable to all countries is the most that can be achieved. In addition, geographically, the ESA headquarters is located in Paris, somewhat remote from the main European decision-making centre in Brussels. Overall, the political evaluation must be that ESA has never been near the core of the European integration process. Here, again, Monnet might have a point when he says that no bold endeavour can succeed under unanimity rule<sup>13</sup>.

The combination of this rationale with the theoretically positive preconditions of “low politics” and “novelty”, as outlined, suggests that a

---

11. Jean Monnet, *Mémoires*, Fayard, Paris, 1976, pp. 491, 497.

12. Jean Monnet, *Mémoires*, p. 492.

13. Jean Monnet, *Mémoires*, pp. 333, 413.

European Space Strategy is ideally poised to be taken over as a future external policy objective of the EU – space exploration.

### **Institutional Considerations**

Against this background, is it not time to give some thought to the idea of applying supranational principles to the European Space Agency (ESA) and, with the next treaty reform, bringing it under majority-voting rules? This should, on the one hand, get rid of the slow progress resulting from unanimity and would, on the other hand, move ESA nearer the centre of the stage of political Europe. A more prominent role for ESA and a more proactive European space policy would be the most likely outcomes. More concrete repercussions and consequences of such increased activity and status are almost impossible to gauge, a situation which is really the hallmark of the New, as Maurice Schumann put it<sup>14</sup>, but this should not therefore prevent initiatives in that direction. It is clear that in other parts of the world the formidable uncertainties do not prevent nations such as China and the USA from pursuing their space endeavours<sup>15</sup>. Nor should they prevent European nations from launching an ESS under EU auspices. Although funding for the European space programme will necessarily have to be stepped up sharply over time, the initial step of institutional reform is more a question of political will than of the allocation of additional resources. Again, the old policy objectives of prevention of military conflict can serve to support this rationale. Founding fathers such as Konrad Adenauer and Robert Schuman made a deliberate policy choice for peace, as the most pressing and uncontested object after the ordeal of World War II, and this policy goal found its practical expression in the European integration process. Although it might be argued that there were important economic motivations for European integration<sup>16</sup>, few would disagree that funds in fact followed politics and that the European institutions were set up as a result of this deliberate policy choice for European development based on cooperation

---

14. Maurice Schumann (MRP), Secretary of State in the Foreign Office, in JO, 2ème Lég., 20/11/53, p. 5361I-II, for a more detailed reference to this, see also T. Hoerber, 'The Nature of the Beast: An essay on the past and future purpose of European integration', subheading III.

15. The competitive factor between nations as a motivation and driving force for space programmes will not be discussed here, but in a later paper.

16. See Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Routledge, London, 2000.

and integration, not rivalry, and on the need to gather together in a healing process the fragments of a war-ravaged continent. Therefore, it seems to be imperative to reach that political decision in favour of the European Space Strategy, to designate ESA as the executive body of this policy and to bring the space agency under a common decision-making process, implementing supranational principles. Again, taken from historical examples it seems to be reasonable to assume that institutional evolution will follow the requirements of the service and that the necessary funds will be made available in due course when the actual concrete applications become obvious, i.e. when the benefits of space exploration in whatever form will prove more tangible.

### **Historical Comparisons – The Navy, Colonial Relations and Space Exploration**

Having argued that there is a sensible case for a Space Strategy in a European context; one may consider comparable historical experiences to estimate what kind of challenge the EU faces in space exploration. An analogy with the exploration of the new world at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century offers a similar scenario, though of course only on a much more primitive technological basis, i.e. in seagoing ships. This paper is not the first to suggest a parallel between seafaring tradition and navies, on the one hand, and space travel and its respective vehicles, on the other. The US space programme, indeed, uses ranks and established practices from the US Navy, and this is not mere whimsy. The analogy of space as the high seas and boundless oceans of our time, therefore, has some plausibility insofar as it considers the advancement of technology with the increased challenges explorers will meet in space. In addition, the history of seafaring nations and their navies coincides with the development of overseas relations and eventually expansion, to the extent that navies must be seen as the tool which made first steps outside of the land-bound territories possible. In later days, navies maintained sea communications and facilitated the administration of far-flung colonial empires, such as the British. Here, too, space seems to have characteristics comparable with those of the sea, insofar as individual nations are just about making their first steps towards reaching beyond their earth-bound territories. An analysis of the naval affairs of great maritime nations should, therefore, shed some light on the motivations behind seafaring initiatives, as diverse as trade, empire, or simply sheer unbridled, very human curiosity and the lure of the unknown. Such an

analysis should bring out the underlying reasons for maritime outreach and, if the analogy to space travel is right, should result in some conclusions as to whether the preconditions for space exploration are now met, and should give some indication as to what could be done under a European Space Programme to promote a major endeavour. Again, if this analogy is right, the internal workings of navies, procedures established over centuries, experience gained from the naval services and, not least, the people working in the navies will be of the utmost importance if the space programme were to be placed on a broader basis, i.e. an active European Space Strategy.

Such an argument does, of course, clearly evoke the era of colonialism, when the navies and with them the sea communications saw their greatest expansion. Europe seems to be uniquely poised to benefit from such past experience as it has the most important seafaring nations and vast Empires held together by sea communications among its ranks. XV<sup>th</sup> century Spain and XVI<sup>th</sup>-XVII<sup>th</sup> century English and French experiences as well as to a minor extent ancient Greek maritime expansion, impressions from the trading empire of the Dutch Republic and the rapid build-up of the German Imperial battle fleet at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are all sources of useful insights into the working of the most important navies and most daring maritime endeavours and will, hence, provide useful indications to inform the development of a European Space Strategy, which will, however, require a mass of much more detailed studies. Here, it seems to be important to point out that the navies were tools in the hands of men and that expansion, colonialism and imperialism were policies that could be implemented for better or worse. Hence, an historical analysis of such phenomena could well help to protect us against the more malign tendencies in such policies while recognising the positive potential of a European Space Strategy. Such future research work will, therefore, also consider whether adequate guiding principles for space exploration are in place or still have to be developed in order to guarantee the responsible use of the outcomes of an ESS and, for example, prevent any recurrence of the atrocities of the colonial age, i.e. prevent exploration turning into exploitation.

## **Conclusions**

Without prejudicing the more detailed historical analyses of national navies and connected issues of colonialism, trade, exploration and war which are yet to be carried out, it is safe to conclude that major expansion

steps, such as the discovery of the new world, had beneficial effects for the societies which provided the political, economic and social bases for such exploration efforts. Clearly, selfish motives play an important role here, for example, faster economic growth and technological progress, or, in more direct and real terms, through the resources and commodities taken from the colonies to boost private and public assets and revenues at home. In particular, based on this rationale, there is the danger on the one hand, that exploration turns into exploitation – very vividly experienced by those subject to the European exploration of the early modern times. On the other hand, such expansion can also have a destabilizing effect on the societies of the explorers themselves, leading to political, economic and social turmoil; witness the case of early modern Spain.

Therefore, caution in the actual implementation of a strategy of exploration, i.e. in an ESS, is indispensable, in particular, in the later stages when it can be expected that it will have developed its own momentum. The formulation of a clear set of guidelines for space exploration based on the establishment of normatively “good” objectives seems to be advisable. Before that happens, institutional reform of ESA will be the first step to trigger such dynamism, without which, the ESS will not become possible. There is clear evidence that supranational principles provided this very dynamism for previous European communities and later the EU and against this background should be able to do the same for the future space endeavours of the European peoples under the unifying, protective and incentivising common umbrella of the European Union.

Thomas Hoerber.