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English only

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Sixty-eighth session

Vienna, 25 June-2 July 2025

Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

**Report of the Legal Subcommittee on its
sixty-fourth session**

Proposal for a study group on legal and policy aspects of space traffic

**Conference room paper by Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil,
Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany,
Greece, Italy, Luxemburg, Mexico, the Kingdom of the
Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, South
Africa, Switzerland, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates**

I. Introduction

1. At the 63rd session of the Legal Subcommittee in 2024, Germany proposed the establishment of a Study Group to produce a research report on legal and policy aspects of space traffic. The proposal was further discussed during the 64th session of the Legal Subcommittee in 2025, as the result of which the Subcommittee “noted the importance of further discussing legal and policy aspects of space traffic management, taking into account the interests of developing countries and emerging spacefaring nations and giving equal consideration to the work of both subcommittees, and that the Committee should be able to rely on the expertise of both of its subcommittees with a view to produce tangible results for a possible UNISPACE IV.” (LSC Report reference). Furthermore, the Subcommittee “recommended that the proposal for a study group on the legal and policy aspects of space traffic be considered further during the sixty-eighth session of the Committee” (LSC Report reference).
2. Many States, including States members of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, have implemented policies, best practices and requirements at the national and regional levels to address increasing space traffic in Earth orbit. In doing so, they contribute to the objective articulated in the Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities, namely to “promote regulations and policies that support the idea of minimizing the impacts of human activities on Earth as well as on the outer space environment” (Guideline A.2 para 2 lit. d).
3. The Member States submitting this proposal consider the establishment of a study group on legal and policy aspects of space traffic under the agenda item

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“General exchange of views on the legal aspects of space traffic management” an important step in advancing the understanding of the topic and building up capacity and expertise within the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. Studying regulations, policies, best practices and requirements at the national and regional levels to address increasing space traffic in Earth orbit would be a starting point for the further consideration at the international level. The study group at the Legal Subcommittee could complement the work of the Working Group on the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activity and discussions on global space situational awareness coordination, including those conducted by an envisaged Expert Group on Space Situational Awareness, at the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee.

II. Composition, scope and expected results

4. The Study Group is open to participation of all COPUOS member States. It could gather governmental experts with the relevant legal and policy expertise on space traffic. States members of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space could be invited to designate one focal point to ensure their continued participation in the study group, as well as additional experts. Organizations with permanent observer status with the Committee conducting work related to the scope of the study group may be invited to participate.
5. The task of the study group could be to compile, within two years, legal and policy questions related to space traffic, taking into account regulations, policies, best practices and requirements at the national and regional levels as well as international law, including international space law, with the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, at its core.
6. The Study Group could report on its deliberations to the Legal Subcommittee under agenda item “General exchange of views on the legal aspects of space traffic management” and ~~to~~ present existing approaches and elements to be considered by States members when discussing legal and policy questions of space traffic, including the interests of developing countries and emerging spacefaring nations.
7. In order to facilitate the collection of the relevant regulations, policies, best practices and requirements at the national and regional levels, as well as the identification of existing international norms, a questionnaire addressed to all the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space delegations could be used.
8. The study group could convene a drafting group to compile its research report for endorsement-consideration by the study group. The drafting group could consist of fifteen members nominated through the regional groups, which will ensure fair and equitable geographical representation. Regional groups are invited to strive for inclusivity for space-faring, non-space-faring and emerging space-faring nations as well as developing countries when making their nominations.
9. The study group would not be meant to take any decisions or to prescribe any results of potential further deliberations of the Committee and its Subcommittees. Its sole purpose would be to compile existing and evolving national, regional and international developments by gathering the current state of play, and to consider possible ways forward concerning space traffic, for consideration by the Legal Subcommittee through established procedures and practices.

III. Proposed next steps

10. Following the introduction of the proposal at the 63rd session, further discussions at the 64th session and the recommendation of the Legal Subcommittee to the Committee to further consider the proposal, the Committee is invited to take note of and decide on this revised proposal for the establishment of a study group on legal and policy aspects of space traffic during its 68th session. Possible language for the report of the 68th session of the Committee including on the mandate, terms of

reference, methods of work and workplan of the study group is provided in the annex to this paper.

Annex

Additional text in support of the proposal for a Study Group on Legal and Policy Aspects of Space Traffic at COPUOS Legal Subcommittee

Reflecting on the constructive exchange in the informal meetings on the Proposal for a Study Group on Legal and Policy Aspects of Space Traffic held by Germany and other delegations on 24 and 25 June 2025, the following text is proposed to reflect a possible decision of the Committee to establish the Study Group on Legal and Policy Aspects of Space Traffic under the agenda item “General exchange of views on the legal aspects of space traffic management” at the Legal Subcommittee.

Possible language for the report of the 68th session of the Committee (status 24 June 2025):

“The Committee had before it the following:

[...]

Conference room paper by Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxemburg, Mexico, Netherlands (the Kingdom of), New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates entitled “Proposal for a Study Group on Legal and Policy Aspects of Space Traffic” (A/AC.105/2025/CRP.xx), which in its annex also contained a proposal for a mandate, terms of reference, methods of work and workplan of a Study Group on Legal and Policy Aspects of Space Traffic to be established at COPUOS Legal Subcommittee.

The Committee agrees to establish a study group on the legal and policy aspects of space traffic at the Legal Subcommittee under the agenda item “General exchange of views on the legal aspects of space traffic management” in accordance with the proposal contained in A/AC.105/2025/CRP.xx. The Committee further noted that the mandate, terms of reference, methods of work and workplan of the Study Group were contained in annex xx to the present report.”

Proposed mandate, terms of reference, methods of work and workplan for consideration by COPUOS at its 68th session

Mandate:

The Study Group will identify, within two years, legal and policy aspects related to space traffic, taking into account regulations, policies, best practices and requirements at the national and regional levels as well as the international legal framework governing outer space activities, with the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, at its core.

The Study Group will report on its deliberations to the Legal Subcommittee under agenda item “General exchange of views on the legal aspects of space traffic management” and present existing approaches and elements to be considered by States members when discussing legal and policy questions of space traffic, including the interests of developing countries and emerging spacefaring nations.

Terms of reference:

Participation in the Study Group is open to all member States of COPUOS. States members are invited to designate a focal point to ensure continued participation in the Study Group. The work of the Study Group will be led by co-facilitators appointed through the regional groups.

To facilitate the collection of the relevant regulations, policies, best practices and requirements at the national and regional levels, as well as the identification of existing international norms, the Study Group will develop a questionnaire. Based on the inputs received by member States, organizations with permanent observer status with the Committee and experts conducting work related to the scope of the Study Group, a drafting team, consisting of fifteen members nominated through the regional groups, will compile the research report for consideration by the Study Group.

In order to avoid a duplication of work, to benefit from the relevant scientific and technical expertise and to foster synergies and cooperation, the Study Group shall coordinate closely with a possible Expert Group on Space Situational Awareness of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, including through sharing working documents, having representatives from the other group participate in its meetings, providing co-facilitators summaries after each meeting to the other group and holding joint meetings at the sessions of the main Committee.

Methods of work:

The Study Group will meet both on the margins of the sessions of the Legal Subcommittee in a hybrid format and during the intersessional period in an online format. The Study Group could hold joint meetings with a possible Expert Group on Space Situational Awareness of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee during the 69th and 70th session of the Committee. The Office for Outer Space Affairs will facilitate the work of the Study Group.

Workplan:

Intersessional period before the 65th Session of the Legal Subcommittee in 2026:

- Member States are invited to designate a focal point for the Study Group by 30 November 2025.
- The regional groups are each invited to appoint one co-facilitator, as deemed appropriate, to lead the work of the Study Group by 30 November 2025.
- Member States are invited to nominate through regional groups members of the drafting team by 30 November 2025.
- December 2025 – January 2026: The Study Group meets intersessionally in an online format to establish a drafting team based upon nominations through regional groups.
- February 2026 – April 2026: The drafting team prepares a draft questionnaire prior to the 65th Session of the Legal Subcommittee in 2026.

65th Session of the Legal Subcommittee in 2026:

- The Study Group reviews and adopts the questionnaire.
- The Study Group collects information by member States and permanent observers on the relevant regulations, policies, best practices and requirements at the national and regional levels, as well as for the identification of existing international norms.
- The co-facilitators summarize the work of the Study Group for information to a possible Expert Group on Space Situational Awareness of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee.

69th Session of the Committee in 2026:

- The Study Group could hold joint meetings with an envisaged Expert Group on Space Situational Awareness of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee to discuss the status of its work and possible questions of mutual interest.

Intersessional period before the 66th Session of the Legal Subcommittee in 2027:

- Member States and organisations with permanent observer status to the Committee are invited to give input to the questionnaire by November 30th 2026.
- December 2026 – April 2027: The drafting team prepares a draft research report.

66th Session of the Legal Subcommittee in 2027:

- The Study Group reviews and adopts the research report and reports to the Legal Subcommittee, including recommendations on a possible way forward.

70th Session of the Committee in 2027:

- The Study Group could hold a joint meeting with a possible Expert Group on Space Situational Awareness of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee to discuss the outcomes of its work and possible questions of mutual interest.
