

Germany, Item 6

UNCOPUOS Scientific and Technical Subcommittee

61st Session, Vienna, 29 January–9 February 2024

Statement by Germany on

Agenda item 6: Space debris

Madam Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

the number of launches and spacecraft deployed into Earth orbit – mainly into the Low Earth orbital region – remained at a very high level in the past year. To ensure safe operation of spacecraft in these increasingly densely populated orbits it is of utmost importance to limit the growth of space debris.

The new Space Strategy of the German government – that was released in September last year – reinforces Germany's commitment to the sustainable and safe use of space, recalling the importance of preventing the generation of space debris, and defining "sustainable use of space" as one of the high-level priorities for German space policy.

Madam Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

Germany continues to actively address space debris issues by means of scientific research, the development of relevant technologies for mitigating and remediating space debris, and by implementing space debris mitigation measures in national space activities consistent with the "UNCOPUOS Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines" and the "IADC Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines".

Last year, Germany hosted a competition for zero-cost flights of mini-satellites on microlaunchers developed and built in Germany. These satellites have to fulfil a number of requirements including to install aids onboard their small spacecraft to enhance their trackability for improved orbit determination and thus to support collision avoidance, but also to assess the impact of spacecraft on astronomy to support dark and quiet skies. With these requirements, Germany aims to support the sustainable use of space.

Last year German experts from the DLR Space Agency contributed to the drafting of the Zero Debris Charter that was released in autumn. This document is the result of an open and collaborative drafting process including agencies, industry and academia. The German Space Agency intends to sign up to the charter later this year.

Research activities on space debris issues conducted in Germany include – inter alia – space debris environment modelling, studies of the effects of hypervelocity collisions of small sized debris on spacecraft, and studies on improved tracking and attitude determination of space debris. Supporting technology developments include the development of passive drag-augmentation devices and robotic technologies that could also be utilised for space debris remediation. With this research, German scientists also contribute to the work of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC). The IADC has worked on its second issue of the “IADC Report on the Status of the Space Debris Environment” which has been brought to the attention of this Committee as a Conference Room Paper.

The German Experimental Surveillance and Tracking Radar – GESTRA – successfully entered into its final test phase. GESTRA will provide the German Space Situational Awareness Centre – GSSAC – with one of the world's most modern radar systems for space debris observation and it will be utilized at European level in the EU Space Surveillance and Tracking project EUSST. Other means to expand our national capabilities for space situational awareness are under preparation to ensure to safe space operation and protect space-based systems from collision risk.

Madam Chair, distinguished delegates,

Germany stays committed to a responsible and sustainable use of the Earth's orbit by minimizing the impact of its space missions on the future orbital environment in order to support a sustainable use of outer space.

We thank you for your kind attention.