

The European Interparliamentary Space Conference (EISC) – Past, Present, Future

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The European Interparliamentary Space Conference (EISC) was established ten years ago in 1999 and now stands at the crossroads with the objective to facilitate the exchange of information on space activities and promote mutual understanding of national policies. Since its establishment the EISC provides a forum for debating issues related to national space policies and the European space policy. It analyses the major issues at stake in the European space sector. The EISC unites bodies dealing with space affairs (either committees or groups) created by national parliaments of Member States of the European Union (EU) or the European Space Agency (ESA) as so-called Permanent Members of the EISC. They decide upon membership, chair the EISC for a calendar year and adopt the resolution. Russia, having created such a dedicated parliamentary body outside of Europe, is currently Member of the EISC and can thus adhere to the resolution. Reflecting upon the most recent developments in the EISC, with Russia asking for Permanent Membership, the EISC is standing at the crossroads. It is facing a political decision about its future in which two scenarios seem to be realistic. Both are mutually exclusive. Thus, the EISC can either further extend its influence within Europe as a pure European institution within the European space architecture may be even as the parliamentary assembly for the European Space Policy (ESP) within an EU framework or it can include non-European countries thereby acquiring a strategic bridge-building function between Europe and non-European space-faring countries.

1. The Past: Background of the EISC

The European Interparliamentary Space Conference (EISC)¹ was established ten years ago in 1999 by the parliamentary groups of Germany, the UK, France and Italy through the adoption of a “Charter of Interparliamentary Cooperation” which became known as the Charter of 1999. The main objective to found such an institution was to facilitate the exchange of information on space activities and promote mutual understanding of national policies.²

Complementary to the Charter agreed upon in 1999, the national parliamentary representatives of Germany, the UK, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium and the Czech Republic

agreed in 2006 on the “Charter of the European Interparliamentary Space Conference”. This new Charter clarifies the different categories of membership to the EISC in details.

Since its establishment the EISC provides a forum for debating European space policy and analyses the major issues at stake in the European space sector.

Accordingly, national parliaments of Member States of the EU or ESA that have created a parliamentary body dealing with space affairs can become Permanent Members of the EISC, allowing them to decide upon membership, chair the EISC for a calendar year and to adopt the resolution unanimously. National parliaments having created such a dedicated parliamentary body outside of Europe can acquire the status of a Member to the EISC. National parliaments of EU and ESA without a parliamentary body dedicated to space affairs can become Associate Members. Observers

¹ Website of the European Interparliamentary Space Conference <www.eisc-europa.eu>.

² Similar interparliamentary organisations for different purposes and with different objectives are listed in European Security and Defence Assembly/Assembly of the Western European Union. “Models and Structures for Interparliamentary Cooperation.” Document C/2055 of 4 Nov 2009. 12.

are national parliaments of the countries with a national space programme.

2. The Present: Reflections on the Recent Developments

In line with the above mentioned membership criteria the EISC currently has nine Permanent Members – Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom - and one Member - Russia. Poland and Romania joined in 2007. Russia joined in 2006.

This year the EISC is chaired until 31 December by the parliamentary space group of the United Kingdom in the person of Ian Taylor, Member of Parliament (House of Commons). The UK decided to focus this year's annual conference, taking place from 25 to 27 October in London on space as a tool for problem solving. In this context all Permanent Members were asked to submit two case studies, showcasing one current or past and one future example of space applications with a money saving character and helping the society. These case studies were put together in a brochure, which was presented at the annual conference to all participants. An accompanying workshop entitled "Space and Copenhagen – Using Space Applications for Combatting Climate Change"³ organised by the UK Parliamentary Space Committee (PSC) and ESPI added to the in-depth discussions on climate change.

This year's conclusions differentiate between issues requiring continued attention and issues requiring renewed or new attention.⁴ As part of the "issues requiring continued attention" the conclusions deal with space as a tool for economic growth and development, the acknowledgement and implementation of space as a problem solver, the successful implementation of Europe's flagship space projects Galileo and GMES and the substantial role for Europe in space exploration. Among the issues requiring renewed or new attention, the conclusions mention space as an instrument for dealing with climate change, the importance of shaping a regulatory framework for a competitive European space sector, space as a tool to secure prosperity, public awareness of space applications and public-private financing

of space projects (PPP). The parliamentary space group of Romania was elected as the next Presidency for 2010.

During the second day of the conference, Russia announced its intention to become a Permanent Member of the EISC. Given that this would require a change in the statutes the EISC is currently based upon, any decision and further discussions were postponed to the next Annual Conference taking place in October in Bucharest.

3. The EISC as an Actor

This year's annual conference for the first time had the topic "the future of the EISC" on its agenda. With Russia asking for Permanent Membership the question about the future of the EISC is put in another context.

Such a decision on the role of the EISC as an institution has important implications not only in the context of the resolution but also in the wider context for the European Space Policy and the institutions involved in its development and implementation. The underlying questions however mostly relate to the question of the EISC as an actor.

While the EISC as an institution already exists for ten years, many questions related to its role in the European space architecture and its relations with other institutions are yet to be clarified and further explored.

The EISC has been created as a relatively loose body with the purpose of exchanging interests and express opinions in an open way. It is however based on two charters. The founding Charter of 1999 and the complementing Charter of 2006. This however still says few about the actual presence of the EISC as an institution on the international scene and its ability to influence others. Both presence and so-called actorness of the EISC have to be further explored particularly in the context of its goals and capabilities.

What specific role among the European institutions dealing with space affairs does the EISC want to fulfil? Who are the addressees of the EISC annual resolution? What specific actions need to be taken once the EISC has decided upon its own role in the future? How should inter-institutional relations be strengthened? Specifically, how should the

³ "ESPI co-organises event on space and climate change with the PSC (UK)." 27 Oct. 2009. 9 Dec. 2009 European Space Policy Institute.

http://www.espi.or.at/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=418&Itemid=37.

⁴ XI EISC Resolution. www.eisc-europa.eu/currentactivities.

relation with the European Parliament be conducted?

4. The Future: The EISC at the Crossroads

Looking at the progress and development of the EISC up until now one can identify two possible future scenarios. Both are not hypothetical in nature but very close to reality. As has been discussed above already, a decision on the future of the EISC is necessary. The EISC is currently at the crossroads, having to choose between two different options for its future which are both mutually exclusive.

One option for the EISC in the future is to further develop its influence within the European context. Considering Russia asked for Permanent Member during this year's EISC annual conference a second possible way forward for the EISC would be to become a strategic actor no longer acting as a pure European institution but taking up a bridge-building function between inside and outside Europe.

4.1 The EISC becoming a more Influential Actor on the European Space Scene

One possibility for the future development of the EISC is to further its influential character within the European space architecture thereby becoming further accepted as a distinct actor by other European institutions. The main motivation for participation in the EISC in this scenario would be internal coordination of national policies at a parliamentary level.

In order to strengthen the EISC as a distinct European actor there is a need for specific strategy development.

As has been shown above, the EISC at the moment is not strongly enough delimited from other European institutions. Such a strategy development would need to include an analysis of the external impact, the internal impact, EISC's visibility and its working efficiency.

In doing so both the goals and necessary actions to reach these goals can be identified in order for the EISC to increase its presence and identify its own capabilities.

An analysis of the external impact of the EISC includes analysing the impact of the EISC on European decision-making. In order to increase this external impact, the EISC Presidency

should introduce formalised meetings with the Council of the European Union, the European Union's Commission and ESA before the Annual Conference is taking place. The relationship with the European Parliament should also be formalised. It should be aimed at identifying joint areas of activities in order to foster joint actions. Looking far ahead in the future, a function of the EISC as being the parliamentary assembly of the ESP within an EU framework (one could compare this with the European Security and Defence Assembly (ESDA)/Assembly of WEU) could be envisaged.⁵ As such while the European Parliament would provide its Europe-wide outlook, the EISC would provide a forum bringing together the national parliamentary grass roots.

In general, EISC's analytical capability should be reviewed and strengthened. There is a need for ensuring adequate continuity of analysis and resulting products.

Internal impact assessment should aim at raising the impact of the national parliamentary space groups within their national parliaments. The EISC could for example be used as a label to increase support in a national debate.

A third point of the EISC's strategy should be to increase its visibility. This could be achieved by furthering the recently inaugurated website, increasing the media attention for EISC's activities and revising the structure of the resolution.

A new strategy for the EISC should also include analysing its working efficiency. This would include a clarification of the four different types of memberships as laid down in the 2006 Charter and particularly between observers and associate members but also between permanent members and members. A multi-year plan for the Presidency should be envisaged. To provide continuity in a rotating Presidency a mechanism for permanent support of the Presidency should be found.

4.2 The EISC with a Bridge-Building Function between Europe and Non-European Space-Faring Countries

As a second possible future scenario for the EISC, one can envisage it as a strategic instrument uniting space-faring nations and functioning as a bridge-builder between Europe

⁵ Website of the Western European Union (WEU). <www.weu.int>.

and non-European space-faring countries. While such a scenario would also allow for the EISC to become a distinct European actor increasing its actorness and presence, at the same time it would exclude the EISC from the possibility to become an influential actor within the European space architecture.

An incorporation of Russia and may be at the later stage other non-European space-faring countries like China and India would reduce the acceptance of the recommendations of the EISC with ESA, the Council of the European Union and other European institutions. Resolutions might be taken note of but having been drafter with the involvement of a non-European actor, they will not be able to exert a direct influence, for example, on the shaping of the ESP or the setting-up of ESA programmes.

At the same time, it would give the EISC the opportunity to act as a normative power, exerting influence and shaping the perceptions and expectations of non-European space-faring countries.

Including non-European space-faring countries in the EISC provides the possibility to serve as a strategic actor, bridge-building to Europe's outside, while at the same time excluding it from the possibility to become an institution fitting within the European space institutional architecture.

This would allow the EISC to advance European values and policies with non-European space-faring countries. The field of influence of Europe could be extended by using the EISC as a strategic instrument.

Bearing in mind these advantages, the basic idea and objectives behind founding the EISC should however not be forgotten. It is intended to provide a forum for exchange of information on national space policy. While trust and confidence might generally be high among European countries given their integration in EU and ESA, the question arises whether an inclusion of non-European space-faring countries as Permanent Members to the EISC might prove as an obstacle to open discussions which would prove contrary to the basic idea of the EISC. This not being the case, the EISC and Europe can strongly benefit from the EISC becoming a strategic actor bridge-building to Russia.

5. The Importance of Taking a Decision on the Role of the EISC

As has been shown, the EISC is currently at the crossroads, having to take a path breaking decision on its own future. Both described future scenarios show-cast the huge potential the EISC as an institution has. It is thus facing a political decision to be taken in the foreseeable future that is within the next two or three years.

Any decision has to include a sustained organisation of its working-methods, an intensification of its activities and an increased influence of its products.

Any longer postponement of the decision on the role of the EISC would eventually lead to the questioning of the value added of the EISC as an institution, putting its credibility at risk. Questions related to its addressees, its relation with other European institutions and its future perspectives should thus be solved rather sooner than later.

Having been founded with the objective to provide a forum for exchanging issues related to national space policy and discussing European space policy issues, the EISC proved as a successful institution bringing together Members of Parliament from across Europe. This year's Annual Conference has again shown the contentment of the Members of Parliament to get together in such a setting.

Thus, regardless of the direction the EISC is going to take, it has a great potential to become an influential actor either within Europe or for Europe to its outside as a strategic actor with bridge-building function.



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