



# Space – a Soft Power Tool for Europe?

Tomas Hrozensky

PhD. Student at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

Visiting Scholar at the Space Policy Institute of the George Washington University in Washington DC, USA

*The ability of a country to make other countries follow its example or to persuade them to do what it wants without coercion has its place in International Relations Studies for more than two decades. Using the words of Joseph Nye, this so-called soft power is as important as hard power for a state to stand its ground in world politics. Realizing the potential of space activities in exercising soft power is not a revolutionary idea. In fact, there are clear, either past (U.S.-Soviet space race in 1960s) or present (some of the Chinese or Indian achievements in space exploration) examples of how valuable could be utilizing space achievements in increasing the attractiveness and reputation of a state. However, debate about space being utilized in exercising soft power seems rather quiet in Europe. Since the European Union as a global actor builds in world politics primarily upon its soft power, this paper deals with the question whether or not could deeper linking of space to soft power for European states be worthy and viable decision.*

## 1 Introduction

The European Union is anything but a typical actor in international politics. Yet what once used to be a state-based environment has been undergoing a change for several decades. World politics is not anymore just about states and relations among them. The EU is clear example of a new type of actor, which is already established on international scene and declared global ambitions (while still did not evolve into some European superstate).<sup>1</sup> This Paper focuses on space activities and in this regard it is thus

necessary to distinguish between political Europe and Europe in Space. The structure of European space sector remains multidimensional. The capabilities are decentralized and overlapping across several levels: supranational (the EU), intergovernmental (ESA or EUMETSAT), national (national space programs) or private.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, since this paper is also about the concept of soft power, the only substantial actor who could engage space capabilities as a tool for soft power on a pan-European level remains the EU. In this regard, it is worth to mention that the European Commission (EC) has demonstrated interest in space agenda and linked it to other

<sup>1</sup> Masar Dusan. Europsky superstat – buducnost ci pritomnost? In Politické vedy. Vol. 15, Iss. 1. 2012, ISSN 1335 – 2741

<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, the level of interaction and cooperation between these levels is strong, stable and frequent.

policy objectives and The European External Action Service (EEAS), is also involved in using space in diplomacy. Space provides the EU with tools to assert its role on the international stage and one can also argue that the EU is in the middle of asserting stronger role in space.<sup>3</sup>

EU's ambition to become a global power in world politics depends firstly on above-mentioned global ambitions and secondly on resources to successfully pursue them. The EU is nowadays influential in nearly every corner of the world and in economic terms,<sup>4</sup> it has the second largest nominal GDP in the world. However, for decades and now even stronger, the EU had its own identity issues (e.g. a question – Do the members states act firstly as themselves or on behalf on common European entity?)<sup>5</sup> and it never was, nor will it probably ever be (on global level) a military power. Luckily for it, the 21st century is a period when one does not necessarily need huge army to exercise power in the world. 1980s saw the birth of term soft power. This concept developed by Joseph Nye introduced understanding of coercion-free mechanisms of persuasion on an international stage. Soft power is an ability of a state to shape the preferences of others, to make them follow its cause, through means like appeal or attraction. In contrast to force-oriented hard power, the defining feature of soft power is non-coercive nature with focus on culture, ideology or political values.

Although being relatively well developed and used in academic environment, soft power has been already challenged as not being as relevant as authors dealing with it claim.<sup>6</sup> The complexity of soft power lies in its inclusion in foreign policy and relation to hard power. If represented by two

simple lines, soft and hard power would not be straight parallel lines that never touch the other one, they would rather be curves, interwoven lines that affect each other and cross together relatively often. Still, soft power has its unique characteristics. Power in general is often recognized according to resources, which provide basis for its projection. The ability to establish preferences, which lies at the heart of the concept of soft power, tends to be associated with intangible assets, which make soft power difficult to calculate in exact numbers. Using another perspective, in business terms for example, leadership is not just a matter of issuing commands, it involves leading by example and attracting others to do what you want.

If the EU may not decisively rely upon hard power in its global ambitions, it leaves the floor open for soft power means. So far this has been the case of the EU, it has been already understood on the European level *that the EU has the potential for leadership, not by its sheer size or its strength, but by setting an example.*<sup>7</sup> But how can soft power be measured, what indicators constitutes it? In economic or social terms, Europe still is a prosperous part of the world. Political regimes tend to be democratic and human rights not violated. On the other hand, soft power remains to be sensitive to perceived changes. And Europe is currently undergoing changes of both internal and external nature. Rise of extremism, continuing migration waves, Brexit or aftermaths of financial crisis might raise a question if European model is still viewed as attractive. Soft power depends on the audience it is oriented at. And there is a possibility that the receivers will do cherry-picking – choosing only certain things over the ones the interpreters would want them take over.

## 2 Space and Soft power

Technological progress and innovations contribute to shaping how a state is perceived in the world. Innovative R&D and modern technologies increase attractiveness of a state on international scene.<sup>8</sup> Classic examples may include ICT, cyberspace in general, bio-engineering and also

<sup>3</sup> Aliberti, Marco. Lahcen, Arne. The Future of European Flagship Programmes in Space. ESPI Report 53. 2015.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf> and <http://data.worldbank.org/region/EUU>

<sup>5</sup> The point here be illustrated even on the level of individual citizens. 2013 Eurobarometer on European citizenship presented how strong are attachments of European citizens towards their country and towards European Union. Although the elements that create the feeling of being European or being national remained alike, the results showed that while more than 90% of EU citizens feel strong attachment to their nations states, only 49% feel this attachment to the EU.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Suzanne Strange's work on Structural Power, where she argues that all forms of power are essentially part of hard power

<sup>7</sup> Arguden, Yilmaz. World Leadership by Example: Challenge for EU. 2000. <http://www.arge.com/en/articles/world-leadership-by-example-challenge-for-eu/>

<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, it is needed to say that technology itself is a neutral category in international politics, and could be used to generate both hard power and soft power

space technologies.<sup>9</sup> The fact is, that space is a contributor to the overall image and reputation of a state. When it comes to space technologies, primarily those related to space exploration have the biggest potential for utilization in increasing soft power. Why is it meaningful to discuss space as potential soft power tool for Europe? According to FRIDE-Chatham House Report on the future of EU,<sup>10</sup> the future of Europe does not look as bright as one may believe. Current economic, demographic and military trends point to the downsizing of the EU's relative weight in the international system by 2030.<sup>11</sup> Hard-power dimension of EU's will probably diminish. Patterns of European military spending point to the further reduction of EU capacity.<sup>12</sup> The report points to the importance of technological progress, stating that dependence of fast-developing technologies, such as space assets will grow. In political terms, shift of power to the East is likely to happen, with risk of inter-state conflict becoming higher.

So if lower global influence and new emerging players is what Europe will be facing in coming years, those are serious challenges to the global ambitions and intended position of world power. Since hard power means do not seem feasible to increase the position in case of Europe, one must venture with soft power means. And that is where we get back to space. Soft power potential of space activities has also its limits and weak points. This effect tends to diminish quickly over time as soon as successful project is finished or enters the phase of routine operations.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless "the legacy prevails". Especially if the space project is the first of its kind. There were no better examples in recent history than space exploration successes. NASA's New Horizons mission, Chinese Moon landing with Yutu rover, Indian Mangalyaan probe successfully deployed

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<sup>9</sup> It is also needed to say, however, that because of globalization processes, technology development is being dispersed throughout the world. Based on this, the relative gain of having technology in terms of soft power is lower than in the past, which means that in order to derive soft power from space technologies, one needs to come up with a high a number and truly extraordinary achievements.

<sup>10</sup> See: [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Europe/Europe\\_Future.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Europe/Europe_Future.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Luzin, Pavel. Outer Space as Russia's Soft-power Tool. In Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security. 2013, vol. 19, iss. 1

on Mars orbit, asteroid landing of Japanese probe Hayabusa, or in case of Europe, the Rosetta mission. Again, soft power operates with general public in other states of the world. Successful space project, be it quite an achievement as in these cases worked fantastically for all of these actors in terms of self-presentation, reputation or attractiveness.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.1 Practical Examples

Soft power potential of space activities has been recognized by space-faring countries in the world already decades ago. Ideological, sometimes even propagandistic element of the space race could serve as a clear example, despite the fact that the concept of soft power has not yet been developed. Both Cold War superpowers, USA and Soviet Union saw the importance of space activities in politics, achievements contributed to the positive image of a country and in fact tipped the scales in a struggle which of two systems is the better one. Present era is not that different, states in the world are aware of this potential. But it is not just the USA (as still the prevailing space power in the world), where soft power potential of engagement in space is utilized frequently. It is also Eastern and Southern Asia that could be pointed at. The case of the USA is an interesting one. To see a slight decrease in intensity of using space in "soft part" of country's foreign policy is not a common trend. On the other hand, it has its reasons. It is more difficult to utilize this potential, when suitable space achievements become less common. That was the case of the USA. In the history NASA served foreign policy interests of multiple US administrations.<sup>15</sup> However, a termination of Space Shuttle program, an autonomous and practically the only one human spaceflight capability, together with a period of rather huge plans than groundbreaking space achievements in years before left arguably less opportunities to work with. Nevertheless, the U.S. still have (and no marginal) soft power in space-related activities. Primarily as a result of numerous achievements, size of space budget but

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<sup>14</sup> There are also other, one can say more visible, or more down-to Earth symbolic elements to demonstrate technological capability, innovativeness and economic or industrial maturity, such as usage of ICTs (i.e. smartphones) in daily life, nevertheless, space represents one possible ways to do this.

<sup>15</sup> Krige John. Nasa as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy. In Societal Impact of Spaceflight. 2007

also due to strong NASA brand that has been created through another element of U.S. soft power - popular culture. Usage and exploitation of U.S. space assets is also present in hard-power line of U.S. foreign policy, as evidenced by robust military space budget and activities in portfolio of the Department of Defense and related institutions.

Soft power dimension of space activities in Asia could be illustrated by already mentioned recent achievements by China, India and Japan. To understand the politics of space in Asia it is necessary to take into account interwoven geopolitical tensions in the region and many historic conflict lines between states. That contributes to tense relations among them with efforts to strengthen the position on regional international level. Space activities started to be recognized as useful in this regard. One of key motivations of Asian countries for presence in space has been pride and prestige on international scene, space activities are closely connected to nation-building.<sup>16</sup> Especially Chinese examples show the value of successful space activities in country's foreign policy. Besides various space achievements in last 15 years, China also embarked on a strategy of international space cooperation or aid in space projects, and together with Russia began to be engaged in international space forums. China has thus adapted a strategy of using space and space-related activities as soft power tool of international relations.<sup>17</sup> From different point of view, one could say from realist perspective, China's actions and practices mentioned just above had clear geopolitical motives. China's selection of countries it decided to aid and cooperate with is intriguing. (e.g. Brazil, Venezuela, or Nigeria).<sup>18</sup> In this regard, space clearly helped to secure good relations with countries seen as important in eyes of China's government, it served well as a diplomatic tool. In similar sense, geopolitics could be seen also in China's presence and position and Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organisation (APSCO),

China's leadership in APSCO is not conducted by *example*, but rather by *supremacy*.<sup>19</sup> Developments likely to play out in near future may bring new insights to the discussion about space and soft power. During last couple of years it has become as if generally recognized across the global community that Moon and Mars will be the next targets. Space agencies worldwide pledged to such projects and what is interesting is that these endeavors are considered to get done internationally. It remains to be seen how will these projects, should they be successful, affect the relation between space and state's soft power. Perhaps, a cooperation between strong space players in future endeavors may also become a soft power source – through leading by example and showing that goals can and should be pursued through partnership, rather than by going alone.

### 3 The Case of Europe

So how visible is the relation between space activities and soft power projection in Europe? In detail, this should be primarily represented through activities, strategies and involvement of the EC and EEAS. Firstly, let's look into official documents. The key space policy document of the EU, recently published "Space Strategy for Europe"<sup>20</sup> deals with soft power potential of space activities only marginally and rather implicitly. The Strategy reaffirms European perception of space activities mainly through economic indicators such as growth, jobs creation, industrial competitiveness, innovation or R&D. It includes also some statements relevant for foreign policy,<sup>21</sup> given the scale of the Strategy, these only constitute less significant aspects of European presence in space. The economic rationale behind space activities in Europe remains overarching and reaffirms once again that European space policy is primarily an industrial policy. Recently published strategy pays minimal attention to space exploration and manned spaceflight. If one compares this to the wording from former key space policy document (Towards

<sup>16</sup> Moltz, James Clay. *Asia's Space Race: National Motivations, Regional Rivalries, and International Risks*. 2011, Columbia University Press

<sup>17</sup> Chambers, Rob. *China's space program a new tool for PRC "soft power" in international relations?* Thesis. 2009. Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School

<sup>18</sup> Resource-rich countries vs. China being largest oil importer in the world.

<sup>19</sup> Aliberti, Marco. *Regionalisation of Space Activities in Asia? Espi Perspectives* 66. European Space Policy Institute

<sup>20</sup> See: <http://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/19442>

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* - *Space is also of strategic importance for Europe. It reinforces Europe's role a stronger global player and is asset for its security and defence... The Commission will thus encourage the use of space services, data and applications in EU policies whenever they provide effective solutions*



a space strategy for the European Union that benefits its citizens),<sup>22</sup> it represents negative development, since the former document identified space exploration as one of four priority actions with one of the reasons for this being its political dimension *that goes beyond the issues inherent in research and development.*<sup>23</sup> In both documents however, detailed look at soft power potential of space activities or at its perspective of its use in foreign policy is missing. With regards to space exploration, European Commission's website provides some insight into EU's position on space exploration, arguing that *space exploration is a sector of strategic political importance for the EU and a hallmark of international cooperation.* This position, however, comes from a webpage with slightly outdated information and does not seem to be fully reflected and elaborated in concrete actions.

In summary, the declaratory aspect of official documents seems rather ambiguous. One then needs to focus also on practice. Looking at the flagship space programs in Europe, it is clear that more practical, easily visible results of space activities is preferred – Socio-economic benefits, growth of industry, competitiveness, innovations or even strengthening of security. This is not to say that other uses are missing or that actions done are not reflecting policy statements, it is simply that economic value of space is on the top of priorities list. In fact both European flagship programs, Galileo as a state of the art GNSS and Copernicus as Earth Observation system, are a relevant source of soft power and this should be taken into account given their relevance and capabilities will get more significant in coming years as a result of further. If a new space flagship program emerges in Europe as a result of further Commission involvement, it has been discussed it could possibly be a space exploration project.<sup>24</sup> This would definitely have positive impact of EU's soft power, given the wider political perspective that is embedded to space exploration. *The prestige and soft power associated with having an ambitious space exploration programme would enable the EU to reap a variety of strategic and political benefits.*<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0152&from=EN>

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Aliberti, Marco. Lahcen, Arne. The Future of European Flagship Programmes in Space. ESPI Report 53. 2015.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

At the same time, Europe does have the resources to include space activities in exercising soft power. Stable ESA budget, EU's funding or Horizon 2020 scheme provides enough money to work with. Space sector is developed, more and more European countries are investing in space (number of ESA member states has been growing recently) and international cooperation is a standard pattern of work. So would it be a viable option to invest more in connection between space and soft power?

Firstly, one needs to identify what does constitute soft power of the EU. Of many of its aspects – political, economic, cultural, moral, technological or any other, two words that still describe Europe concisely are prosperous and democratic. In closer look, prosperous refers to prominent position in GDP and GDP per capita statistics in global rankings, free market economy and social benefits, democratic is related to suitable political regime and set of values. Now a problem emerges. It seems (in terms of soft power) that it would be rather silly trying to find a correlation between these factors and space activities. As it was already argued, space technology relates mainly to the technological aspect of soft power. And in this regard, there is a fierce competition going on in the world. In economics or political affairs, the EU may argue for its leadership having an ideal system with free market economy, yet sticking to social values and with democratic political system. There are not a lot of other countries in the world that can compete with that. But in the technological domain, the situation is different, the predominant position is still held by the USA, technological capability and innovativeness is also a perk of Asian countries. The fact is, it is not just the EU, which is at the leading position. Should the EU decide to do more PR concerning innovation and technological progress it would be easier to stimulate the connection between space and soft power. Again, this is not to say, that the EU is not promoting itself in areas such as ICTs, it is just not enough when space is being discussed in foreign policy objectives.

Building upon this argument, inclusion of space as one of soft power tool of EU's foreign policy would require to rearrange the message that the EU is sending out to the world. There is wide range of space activities, either past, present or future ones that could serve EU's foreign policy, if properly managed. Looking at the activities done

by the EC or EEAS, space is already fulfilling foreign policy objectives of the EU. Negotiations regarding the International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities have been underway for almost a decade. Despite approaching probably not the successful end in adopting single document with widespread support, having such effort on the agenda was conveying multilateral and sustainable approach to space taken by Europe. Furthermore, promoting cooperation and good relations with others is being conducted by the Union also through maintaining official "space dialogues" with major space-faring countries (USA, Russia, China,<sup>26</sup> Japan and South Africa). Contribution of Copernicus to global earth monitoring capacity, participation at the utilization of the ISS, strong economic aspect of space activities or autonomous astronaut program are just few examples, where European space activities stand at a good position.<sup>27</sup> One of the most prominent examples stands out among the others – the Rosetta mission. Its experience showed that a successful space activity, if well-advertised, is not a just a tool that could be used to project soft power, it does it already and inherently by itself.

Such process of rearranging the message may but also may not seem to be feasible at the time being. It would require dedicated process with clear outcome, something, preferably in a form of strategy that could be easily referenced to when needed. Currently, the use of the concept of soft power is at the European level more like a general consensus. There is not relevant official document dedicated to the soft power of the EU, which would be dealing with attractiveness, prestige and reputation of the EU as being parts of Union's foreign policy. One needs to look and delve into other, more general documents. Such as the European Security Strategy.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, soft power and its elements are not being properly discussed here. It would be more suitable to start including this concept in official policy documents,

<sup>26</sup> In case of China the space dialogue is formally a tripartite forum - EU-ESA-China

<sup>27</sup> In order to frame both strengths and weaknesses of European space activities, one should also highlight the fields where Europe is behind - lack of military and dual use capabilities, fragmented governance or innovation in reusable launchers.

<sup>28</sup> See: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>

and it should be included explicitly, not just through deduction and analysis. One may argue that soft power is rather a subtle part of diplomacy, which is not suited to be voiced out loud. Recent trends from world politics, however, suggest that it is not necessarily the case. U.S. National Security Strategy from 2015 states in its third page a strategy to *lead by example*<sup>29</sup> (which is inherently how does soft power work), official Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation from 2013 sets an objective to improve *the application of "soft power" and identify the best forms of activities in this area*,<sup>30</sup> and in terms of China, both former and current presidents Hu Jintao (already in 2007) and Xi Jinping publicly proclaimed the need to increase country's soft power.<sup>31</sup> The evidence thus shows that inclusion of soft power into an official and publicly declared approach has become a reality.<sup>32</sup> Last of the EU's official documents dedicated to foreign policy, "A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy" published in June 2016 reaffirms this trend. It explicitly confirms the role of soft power in EU's foreign policy, claiming the Union always prided itself in soft power and continue to do so, because it is *"the best in this field"*.<sup>33</sup> However, more detailed vision could have been outlined in the document to elaborate on means and mechanisms, in which EU's soft power can and should be projected.

One final alternative lies in less radical change of the message. As it was noted, marketing and PR activities or proper advertising of space activity could increase its impact. This could be taken on a more general, European level to focus more on potential impact of space activities on the public. In this way, the overall image that the EU is presenting to the world would not change, it would

<sup>29</sup> See: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> See: [http://en.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk8BZ29/content/id/122186](http://en.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk8BZ29/content/id/122186)

<sup>31</sup> See: <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-civil-society-nationalism-soft-power-by-joseph-s--nye-2015-07?barrier=true>

<sup>32</sup> Since the concept of soft power develops more organically and through a variety of ways, there is not a need how it should be achieved in detail. This, however, does not change the overall message, to generally include the concept of soft power in the EU's foreign policy.

be rather amended and extended with a new element, the technology and innovation. It does not mean, that this is not present at the moment, on the other hand, it has been pointed out, that in science, technology and innovations the competition in the world is extensive. Further and stronger PR and proper advertisement of European space activities may ultimately lead to a situation, when the message described here would encompass primarily not only prosperity and democracy but also technological leadership. What is needed in this regard - primarily funding and also a dedicated long-term vision. Changing the overall image would require longer period of time. Is it feasible? Yes, it is. The question is whether there is a political will for this idea on the European level.

One final point to be brought up is the need to find proper model on the European level for inclusion of space in exercising soft power. It does not seem to be feasible in the intergovernmental framework, through ESA, which still includes less European states in its member base and has character of a scientific and technical cooperation institution rather than one with political agenda outside its virtual borders. This could, however, be attributed to the European Union and its supranational level. Although the soft power dimension of space activities lies mainly in those activities, which have strong prestige element and are mainly conducted by ESA,<sup>34</sup> this does not rule out opportunity to get them included in single European package delivered on the level of European Commission. Though not problem-free, long-lasting cooperation between EU and ESA has already been established. Thus, even if the EU is not directly taking place in space exploration

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<sup>33</sup> See: <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/file/441/download?token=KVSh5tDI>

<sup>34</sup> What might also come into question is whether or not future large-scale space exploration projects in ESA scheme seem feasible, especially considering different political and financial realities from period of 10 or 15 years ago and policy of keeping the science budget flat over the years.

and manned spaceflight, it can gather these soft power resources from its member states or ESA and still incorporate them under single European label.

## 4 Conclusions

Fulfilling the global ambitions of the European Union will require bold moves in the international arena. Since it is primarily soft power that the EU can utilize to achieve its goals worldwide, using space as one of tools of EU's soft power deserves to be discussed. This Paper has demonstrated that space could be considered as a tool for asserting EU's role on the international stage. And it is the EU that should leverage this potential lying in space activities, since it is only suitable actor in Europe for this purpose. What also needs to be taken into account are limits and potential weak spots that are not space-related – such as trends and developments in world politics, whose impact could have diminishing effect on EU's soft power in the world. Nevertheless, EU's soft power should stay a relevant topic in academic or political discussions and be developed further, given that examples from around the world show that soft power has become publicly declared approach. Alternatives described in final part of the Paper outlined ways, how to proceed with question if deeper linking of space to EU's soft power could be a viable decision. Findings of the Paper suggest that soft power potential of space accomplishments is in European case relevant and it is feasible to achieve its utilization. This however, requires changes in policy to be made in order to make the relation between space and soft power a profitable decision. Burden of action in this regard will lie mainly on the shoulders of the European Commission and European External Action Service, but at the same time, there will always be a need for fresh soft power resources such as successful space exploration projects. Considering the enormous public success of the Rosetta mission it could be even argued that space achievements represent something that could be used in tackling own European identity crisis.

### Mission Statement of ESPI

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Email: [office@espi.or.at](mailto:office@espi.or.at)

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