



Will Space Sit in the European Parliament?

Advancing space policy in the European political debate



ESPI

European Space
Policy Institute

ESPI believes the question of Europe's ambition in space, and the role space will play in the future of Europe's global competitiveness is a topic that transcends political boundaries and ideologies. This report is based on a self-funded study and in no way represents an endorsement or support of any political party, political group or individual MEP Candidate.

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1 WILL SPACE SIT IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT?

In recent years, space has increasingly found its way into the political discourse of the European Parliament (EP). The ongoing legislature has witnessed debates on several strategically relevant space-related initiatives, including the creation of the EU Space Programme and the Programme for Secure Connectivity. Yet, judging by the **41% increase in references to space in party manifestos (Figure 8)**, we can expect even more attention given to the topic in the parliament's next seating. Moreover, at a time when **new technologies and innovation** are considered **critical in determining Europe's future competitiveness and prosperity**, **space ranks third (Figure 9)**, right after artificial intelligence and batteries, among technology domains prioritised by political parties.

This report, unlike most discussions on European space policy, is not exploring capability development or targeted space policy documents. By analysing party manifestos leading up to the European elections in June 2024, it rather develops an **outside-in approach, exploring how political parties and individual MEP candidates perceive, frame and leverage space in their election campaigns** and general discourse. More information on the objectives, scope and methodology can be found in Chapter 2.

Beyond the increase in references and the comparison with other technologies, the most striking difference with 2019 is how space is framed in 2024. Historically, the use of space solutions in **addressing Europe's policy priorities** has shown strong potential, especially in fields such as mobility, agriculture, climate resilience, and security, yet the **policy impact of space is still to be developed**.¹ More than ever political parties now address space as an **element of Europe's economy, security, and innovation (Figure 14)**, rather than a technological domain in isolation. This indicates that space policy is now intertwined with broader strategic goals and should be **addressed through a political lens, embedding space policy within high-level national and European political discourse**.

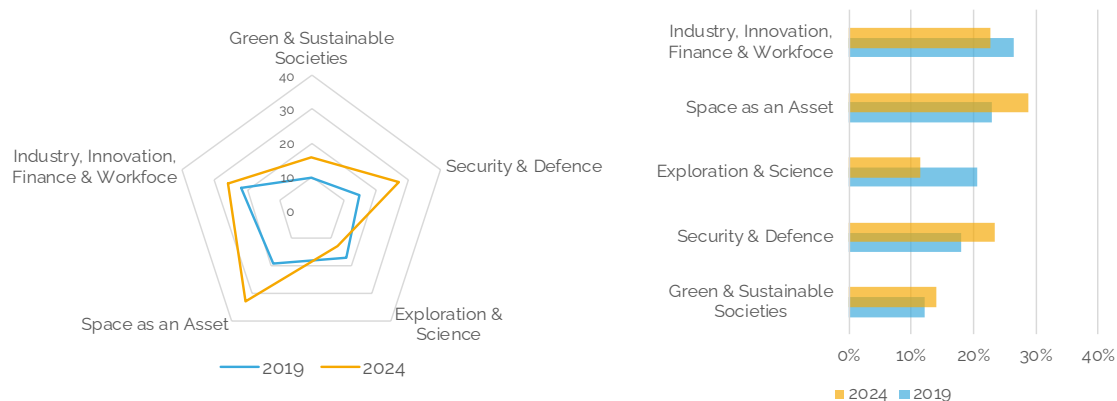


Figure 1: Distribution of space-related references across ESPI 2040 Policy Domains

Moreover, while references to security and defence aspects of space were often negative in 2019, the narrative has shifted. In 2024, the **security and defence utility of space is addressed more positively**, with the nexus having seen the **strongest increase in references**, and now spans the entire political spectrum.

In terms of underperformers, while there are several references to Europe's autonomy in space, the **manifestos fall short of recognising the connection between the aspiration and the need to ensure a strong and innovative European space industry**, with long-term financing and revenue perspectives. The opportunity to highlight exploration and science more prominently was avoided (with notable exceptions), likely due to crises-driven narratives of contemporary political discourse, with little appetite to propose an opportunity-driven counterpoise.

¹ European Court of Auditors, Special Report, EU space programmes Galileo and Copernicus: services launched, but the uptake needs a further boost, 2021 (Link)



Analysing affiliation-related trends, space is now more **evenly distributed across almost all political groups**, indicating a broader recognition of its importance. What's more, the dispersion of space mentions is **more widely scattered across various political parties**, rather than being concentrated within a few, underscoring a collective acknowledgement of the **critical role space will play in Europe's future competitiveness, security and defence, and the green transition**.

Grounded in the conviction that space, along with other future-defining technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Biotechnology, New Energy, and Quantum Computing, will **define Europe's future role in the world**, we believe there is a **need to further strengthen the role of space in the European Parliament**. Considering this, we propose **three short-term actionable recommendations**:

-  **European Parliament Membership in EISC:** The EP should consider actively joining the European Interparliamentary Space Conference (EISC) to enable even greater collaboration and information exchange on space-related issues between national and the EU parliament
-  **Active Engagement by the European Space Sector:** European space actors, including agencies, must engage more proactively with MEPs and other policymakers to address the policy value of space in all sectors to develop further uptake of space solutions for European policy priorities (Competitiveness, Security, Climate, Innovation, Energy)
-  **Establishment of a Sub/Special Committee on Future Technologies:** The EP should consider establishing a subcommittee or special committee dedicated to key future technologies, including space, to ensure focused and strategic discussions on these critical areas that will define Europe's future in the world.

Figure 2: Recommendations to further raise awareness of the impact of space on Europe's policy priorities²

In this context, the European Space Policy Institute (ESPI) commits to further pursue its mandate of setting up an active forum for the analysis and discussion of European needs, capabilities and long-term prospects in space activities, and the definition of long-term European orientations also through **reinforced relations with the European Parliament**.³ To this end, ESPI commits to:

-  **Enhance ESPI's Monitoring and Analysis:** ESPI will regularly monitor and analyse political debates in the EP related to space and future-defining technologies, providing timely and relevant insights and recommendations.
-  **Engagement with MEPs and Parliamentary Services:** ESPI will actively engage with MEPs, parliamentary assistants, and the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) to ensure cross-fertilisation of views on space-related issues in Europe.
-  **Targeted Capacity Building:** ESPI is establishing capacity-building opportunities for MEPs and civil servants. ESPI's inaugural Summer Bootcamp, part of Forum Alpbach in Austria, will take place in August 2024, offering a platform for knowledge exchange and skill development in space policy.

Figure 3: Commitments to foster informed political discussions on Europe's space ambitions and long-term needs

The integration of space into the political fabric of the European Parliament is crucial for Europe's strategic positioning globally. By raising awareness, fostering engagement, and establishing dedicated platforms for discussion, **the EP can ensure that space is not overlooked when discussing Europe's future**. ESPI remains committed to supporting these efforts, providing expertise, and fostering connections between the space ecosystem and political representatives.

² The **European Interparliamentary Space Conference (EISC)** is a permanent forum for inter-parliamentary cooperation in space between the European parliaments interested in space policy established in 1999. It aims to facilitate the exchange of information on space activities and policies by providing a forum for analysing the major issues at stake in the European space sector. This forum is supported by the European Space Policy Institute (ESPI).

³ Since 2023 **MEP Niklas Nienäß is serving on ESPI's Advisory Council**. The invitation marked ESPI's commitment to build stronger relations with the European Parliament and inform decision-making on European space priorities through research-driven insights.

2 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE REPORT

With the next **European Parliament (EP) elections taking place in June 2024**, this report aims to provide an insight into the role played by space-related matters within the EU's political debate. This encompasses how political parties and MEP candidates address space and frame it when addressing the electorate, as well as the discussions in public settings among candidates for the EP.

Indeed, as the European Parliament has relevant responsibilities both in the policy definition and legislative process of the EU, an analysis of the **prevalence of space in debates and public engagements** during the election campaign can be a good indication of the attention devoted to space once Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected.

Another valuable layer of the analysis identifies policy priorities that space is linked to, both in party manifestos as well as candidates' statements, providing an opportunity to (i) **better identify the policy priorities that space can best serve** in the eyes of MEPs, and (ii) find **political partners and allies in furthering the prominence and prevalence of space** in political debates, reports, and legislative proposals.

Finally, the report also serves as an actionable tool for industry executives and civil servants to **identify political appetite for space-related policy action**, and for citizens to **monitor the implementation of the declarations made in the run-up to the elections**.

2.1 Scope of the Report

The study aims to address **the role given to space in electoral programs of political parties (manifestos) and public statements** given by MEPs on the social media platform X (previously Twitter). The study covers **all EU countries and all major political parties** active within both forms of media. The analysis of manifestos is completed in a comparative manner, also taking into account the previous EP election in 2019 in order to uncover disparities and developments.

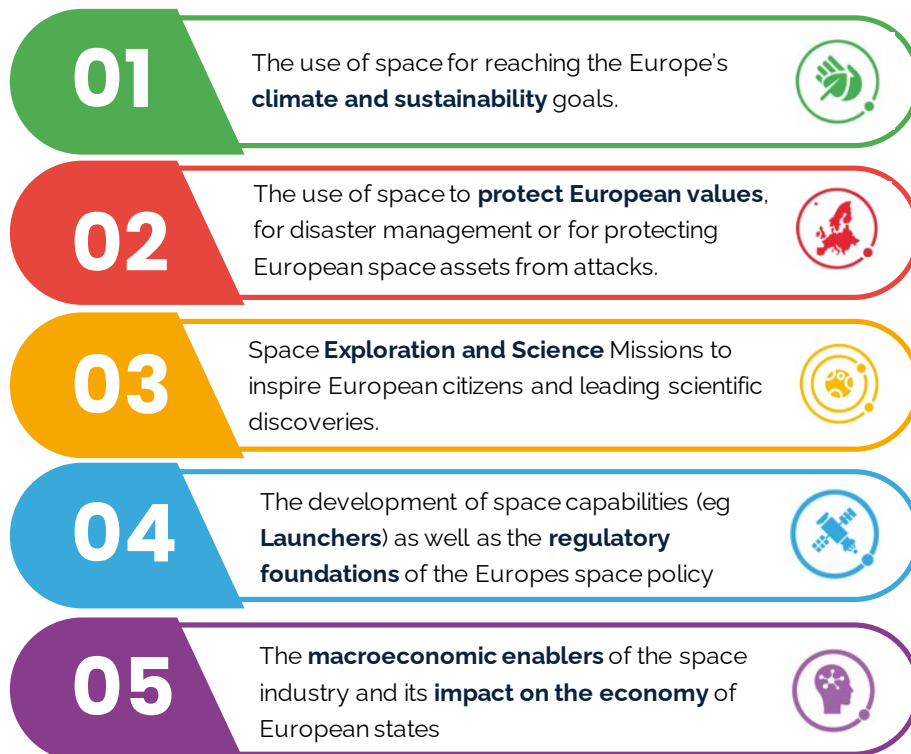


Figure 4: Overview of ESPI2040 research domains



The overall objective of the report is to understand both **the prevalence of references to space and how the topic is framed in relation to other policy priorities**. References to space will be linked to specific topics, which can be grouped into five broader themes, also defined in the recently published ESPI flagship document, i.e., ESPI2040.⁴ For the aims of this report, these research topics are translated as displayed in Figure 4. Based on these foundations, an overview and assessment will be provided to stakeholders regarding the relative salience of space-related issues within one of the European Union's legislative bodies, and **the angles from which political parties in Europe view space, and deem as relevant to the electorate** will be determined.

To achieve these objectives, the study adopted several data science techniques, including **data and text extraction, along with translation tools**. For 2019, 118 manifestos were collected in total for all parties present in the European Parliament, with 144 manifestos collected for 2024. Firstly, the manifestos were translated into English, and then scanned for space-related mentions using a manually collated dictionary of space-related words and phrases. Mentions of space generally only refer to **direct mentions of space capabilities, programmes, institutions or use cases**. Generic references to future technologies or innovation are not included. **Natural Language Processing (NLP)** was then used to process the manifestos and match the words to those present in the text.

For the **social media analysis** part of the study, X was used as the data source, with the rationale for this choice outlined in chapter 5 below. **Tweet data was extracted using the X API**⁵ and Python algorithms for all active accounts of current MEPs, from the 1st of February to the 30th of April 2024, with their own retweets and replies excluded. Just over 60.000 tweets were collected in total.

A detailed explanation of the methodology employed for this report can be found in **Annex B**.

3 SPACE, THE EU, AND AN UPCOMING ELECTION

A variety of public and private actors at national, supranational, and intergovernmental level are part of the European space ecosystem, including but not limited to the **European Union (EU)**,⁶ the European Space Agency (ESA), the European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (EUMETSAT), and their respective Member States, along with established and emerging industry players across the value chain.

The EU, and particularly, the European Commission (hereinafter *Commission*), has a key role in the **policy definition** among the European space actors, together with nation-states. Indeed, since 2009 – the date of the entry into force of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) and Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – the role of the EU in space is regulated by Article 189 TFEU, defining space as a **shared competence between Member States (MS) and supranational bodies**. **Legislative power** is also granted to the EU, while any harmonisation of national laws and regulations of its Member States is excluded.

The **European Parliament (EP)** plays a significant role in the legislative procedures of the EU and the adoption of the EU budget, **sharing its legislative powers with the Council of the EU**. To this end, the EP is organised into twenty committees and four subcommittees with specific areas of focus, those of which are tasked with the examination of legislative proposals drafted by the Commission. The Committee dealing with space-related matters is the **Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) Committee**.⁷ Approval, amendment, and rejection of these proposals happen at the

⁴ ESPI 2040. Space for Prosperity, Peace and Future Generations, 2024 (Link)

⁵ X API (Link)

⁶ Encompassing the European Commission, the European Union Agency for the Space Program, the European Parliament, the European Defence Agency and the European Union Satellite Centre.

⁷ For instance, in 2021 the ITRE Committee requested a study on Space Market (Link), which highlighted that EU citizens and public institutions lack awareness regarding the benefits and capabilities of the EU Space Programme.

level of the plenary sessions. Finally, the EP participates in the policy definition process of the EU, primarily through its above-mentioned powers in conditioning the legislative agenda. Chapter 6 will delve deeper into some recent activities of the EP in the space domain.

On top of their work in committees and subcommittees, MEPs can establish more informal exchanges of views within **intergroups**, which also serve as a means for promoting interaction between the EP and civil society. The **Sky and Space Intergroup**, for instance, was created by the Conference of the Presidents (a political body of the EP) in 2019 together with its 2020 Work Programme; its list of strategic priorities encompass (1) the preservation of the budget for the EU space programme under the MFF 2021-2027, (2) the definition of a dedicated industrial policy for space at EU level and mitigation measures related to STM, (3) the promotion of an integration of space-based capabilities into future digital infrastructures.

3.1 The European Parliament Election 2024

In the European Union, the lever to transform political preferences of voters into legislative power distribution is more complex than at national level. Citizens in each EU member state vote for domestic parties, that mostly also run in national elections. These national parties usually convene in European parties, which then sit with other ideologically similar parties in **political groups in the European Parliament**. Following the election in 2019, there are 7 groups represented in the current seating of the EP.⁸ Next to these seven groups there are also currently 51 non-attached (NI) MEPs. Figure 5 below provides an overview of the **distribution of seats** in the current legislative period.

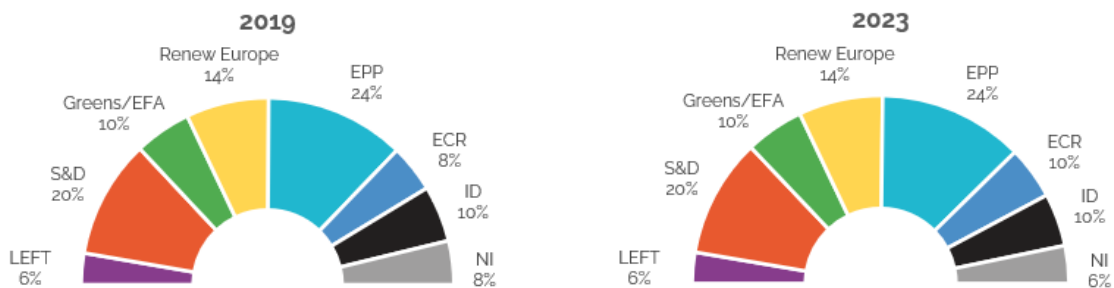


Figure 5: Share of EP seats by political group in 2019 (after elections, 751 MEPs) and 2023 (post-Brexit, 705 MEPs)

However, it has to be noted that although the Groups in theory represent transnational ideological cleavages instead of national interests, domestic politics play a huge role in EP elections. Despite a dominance of national issues in the run-up to the EP elections, we can clearly identify 4 key pan-European topics that make the headlines, with space technologies, services and data playing a clear role in addressing all.

⁸ The Political groups of the European Parliament (Link)



Figure 6: Pan-European trends influencing the upcoming European parliament election

4 SPACE IN PARTY MANIFESTOS

One of the **tools parties employ to formulate their proposals and signal ideological proximity to voter positions are political manifestos**, mostly released in advance of regional, national, or supranational elections. When analysing the presence of specific issues in party manifestos the two variables of interest are the **prevalence** as well as the **framing** of an issue.

Therefore, this chapter analyses **party manifestos devoted to the European Parliament elections 2024**, providing insights on both the number of occurrences as well as their framing of space. In order to have a baseline to compare the current election campaign to, this report also draws on data from the previous European Parliament election held in 2019. Both the prevalence as well as the topic associated with space are measured individually as well as in relation to specific European groups.

Overall, 262 manifestos have been analysed, 118 from 2019 and 144 from 2024. A threshold for including parties among these lists has been set based on a rationale related to polling results, further described in Annex B.

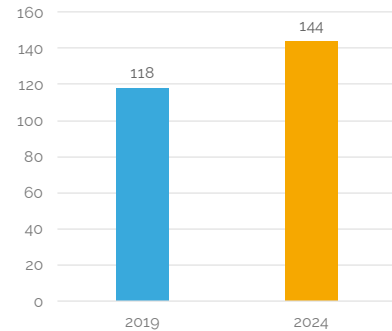


Figure 7: Total number of manifestos analysed

4.1 Prevalence of space

The analysis of prevalence involves **counting the mentions of space in party manifestos**. This involves displaying the overall references to the developed space dictionary compared to the last election, as well as analysing space compared to other technological domains and the distribution of space mentions across European countries.

4.1.1 References to Space in Party Manifestos

Overall, there is a slight increase in the number of parties that mention space **from 25 parties in 2019 to 29 in 2024**, resulting in a **stationary relative share of 20%**.

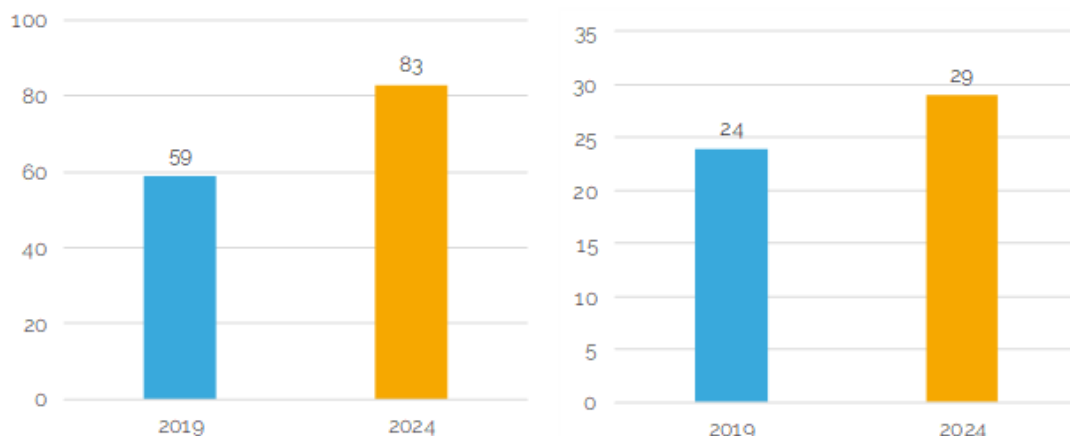


Figure 8: Total number of space mentions (left) and number of parties that mention space in their manifestos (right)

This stationary share does not seem to match the growing importance of space assets in the daily lives of European citizens. However, since space influences many different policy areas, it is possible that parties refer to space multiple times, in different parts of their manifestos. **Looking at**

the total number of space-related mentions, there is a stronger increase than in the total number of parties that refer to space.

In 2019, there have been **59 direct mentions** while this number increased to **83 in 2024**, accounting to an **increase of 41%**. This indicates, that despite not a larger share of parties mentioning space, the ones that do have recognised its value across more domains.

4.1.2 Space vs other technological domains

To accurately assess the role of space in the upcoming election, it is not only necessary to investigate the development of mentions in isolation but to **compare space to other, also emerging, technological domains**. Figure 9 below, presents the references to space in comparison to sectors like AI, nuclear technology, or Internet of Things in party manifestos.

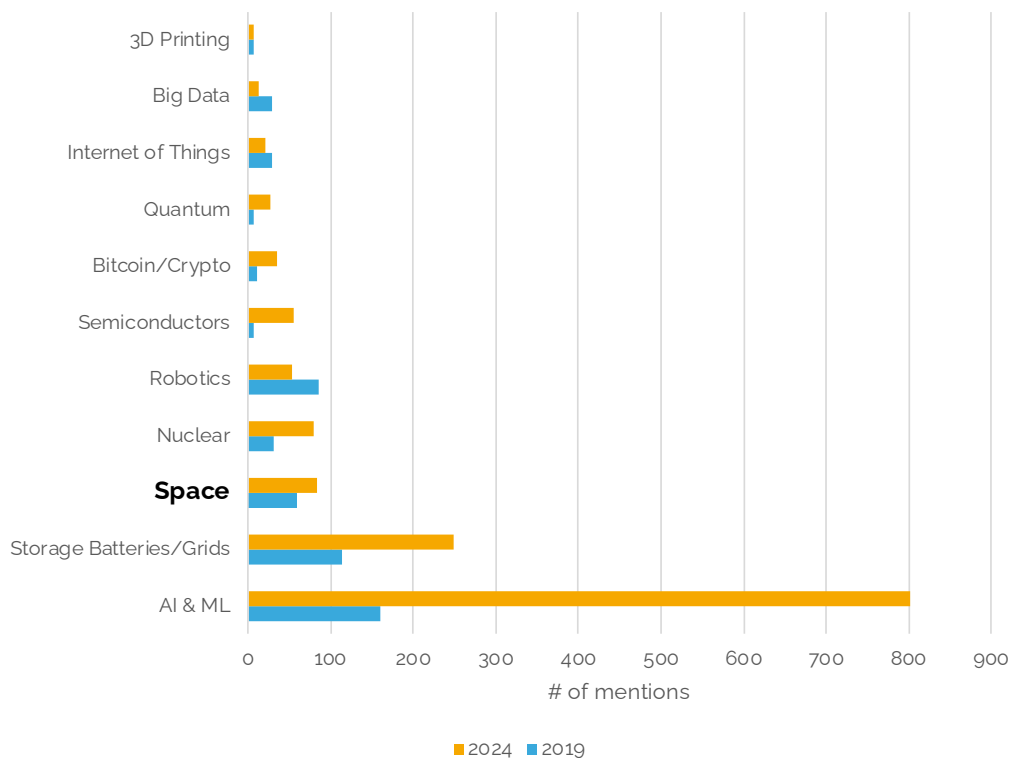


Figure 9: Space vs other technological domains in party manifestos

As visible, **Space receives more attention than several other widely discussed topics such as semiconductors or future nuclear power systems** (excluding mentions of nuclear weapons and the simple use of normal fission reactors).⁹ Space ranks in third place, with only AI/ML and Batteries receiving more attention in party manifestos. It has to be noted that both of these technologies have been at the forefront of technological developments over recent years. Since the release of ChatGPT in late 2022, practically all aspects of economic activity have been influenced by AI. Meanwhile, battery technology and storage grids have been a cornerstone of the green transition which has been a priority of the recent Commission.

⁹ Nuclear technology includes mentions of nuclear technology such as nuclear research, nuclear fusion or beneficial uses, e.g., in medicine. Mentions of nuclear weapons or the mere use of standard nuclear fission reactors have been excluded.

4.1.3 Space mentions across Europe

Overall, **29 different parties in 10 countries mentioned space 83 times** in their manifestos in relation to the 2024 election. The distribution of space mentions across European countries is displayed in Figure 10 below.

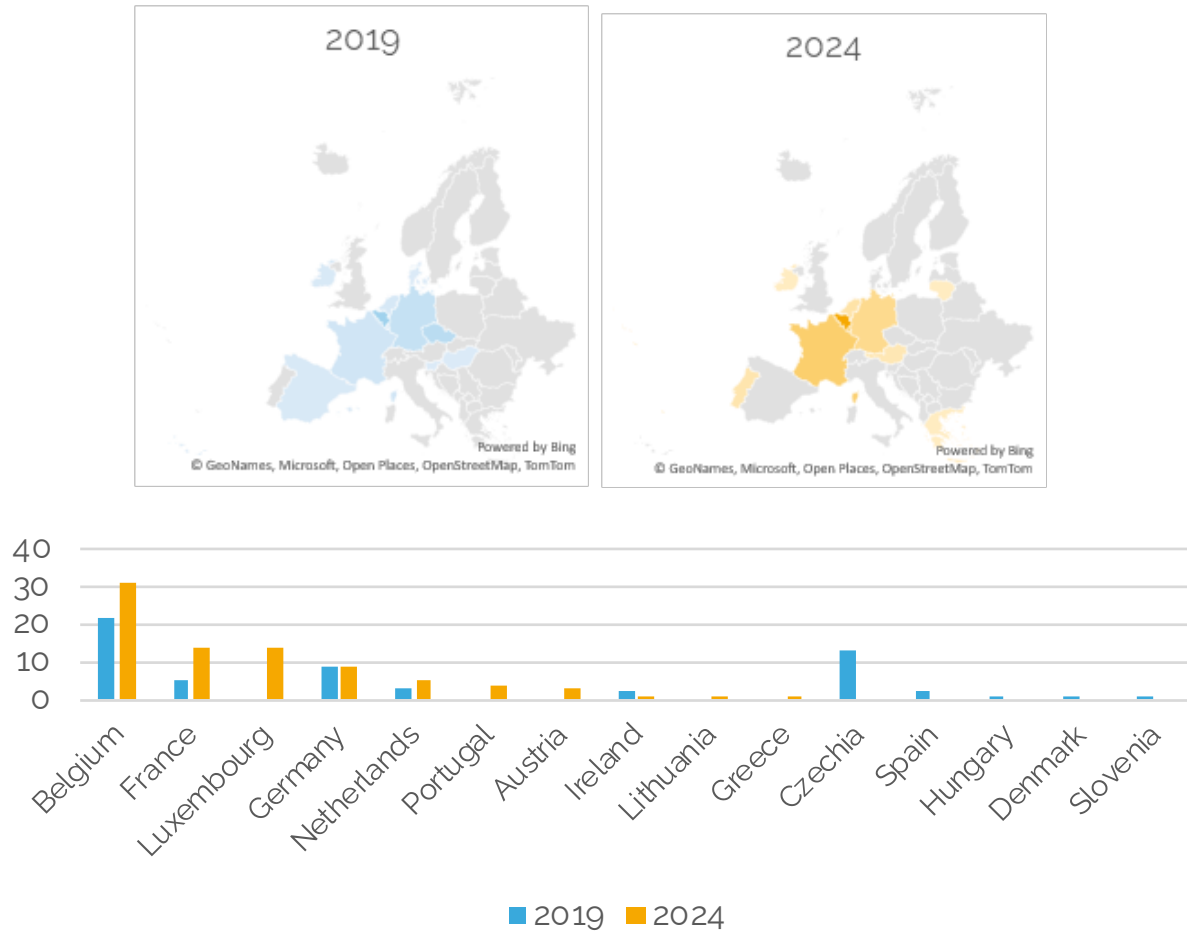


Figure 10: Space mentions across Europe

Space mentions, both in 2019 and 2024 are **mostly distributed across the BeNeLux countries**, as well as the countries that have a traditional strong foothold in the upstream sector, namely **Germany and France**. Reference to space in countries in Southern, Central and Eastern and Northern Europe remains limited or non-existent in both elections.¹⁰ An exception to this is Czechia with a significant amount of space mentions in 2019. As can be seen in Figure 11 below, however, this is only due to two parties, and therefore not necessarily the expression of a broader trend in Czechia. On the other hand, **in Belgium, space is mentioned throughout a wide array of different parties**, that have recognised its value - a trend that was even more pronounced in 2024.

¹⁰ It has to be taken into account, that bigger parties from more populous countries often have much more resources to draft bigger and more comprehensive manifestos, while parties from smaller countries often also have small manifestos that only touch open their few main priorities.

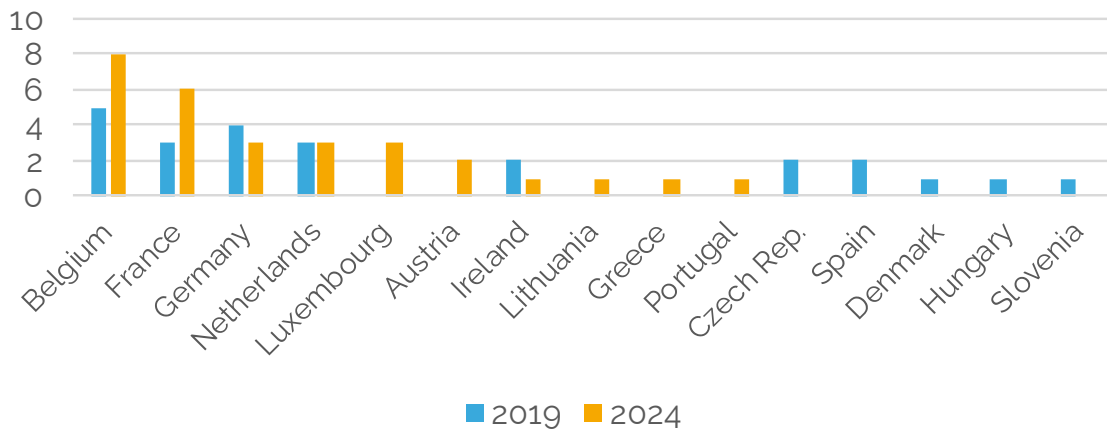


Figure 11: Number of parties with space mentions by country

Looking at the distribution of space mentions within individual parties, it must be noted that **mentions are quite concentrated within the top 5 parties**, whose manifestos alone account for 35 mentions. This translates to **42% of all mentions in 2024**.

Rank	2019		2024	
1	Pirate Party Czechia; Green/EFA	12	Parti Socialiste Belgium; S&D	10
2	Mouvement Réformateur Belgium; Renew	11	ADR Luxembourg; ECR	9
3	Parti Socialiste Belgium; S&D	6	Alliance 90/ The Greens Germany; Greens/EFA	6
4	Alliance 90/ The Greens Germany; Greens/EFA	5	Pirate Party Luxembourg Luxembourg; Greens/EFA	5
5	La France insoumise France; LEFT	3	New Flemish Alliance Belgium; ECR	5
Total mentions by top 5 parties		37	35	
Concentration in top 5 parties		63%	42%	

Table 1: Top five parties by space mentions

However, in 2019 the distribution of space mentions was even more highly concentrated (63%). This **reduction in concentration**, compared with the overall increase in mentions, can be seen as a signal of more actors recognising the added value of space in more aspects of their policies.

It can also be observed that the space-related references in Czechia in 2019 are largely due to one party, the Czech Pirate Party (with 12 out of 13 mentions).

4.1.4 Space mentions by political groups

Although parties are elected nationally, they form **groups in the European Parliament, broadly reflecting different political ideologies**. Investigating the space mentions across European political groups, a significant shift can be observed.¹¹

¹¹ Group association is based on which group parties belonged to in the current period as of 01.05.2024 and not where they might sit in the upcoming term.

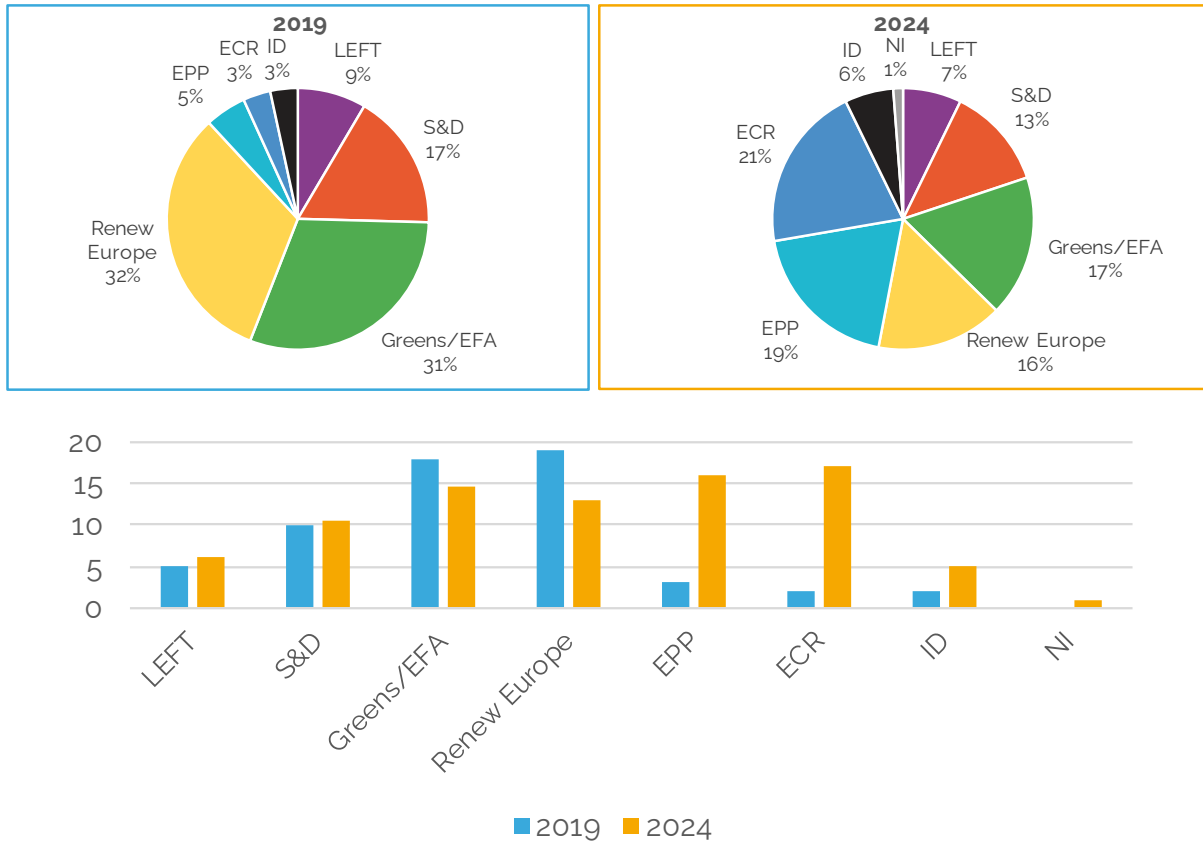


Figure 12: Relative (above) and absolute (below) space mentions by EP groups

In 2019 most parties that refer to space in their manifestos are part of centrist and centre-left political groups with Renew Europe, Greens/EFA and S&D in the top spots, accounting together for 80% of space mentions. **In 2024, space mentions are much more evenly distributed across almost all political groups.** In particular, centre to centre-right political groups such as the EPP and ECR now have a significant share of space mentions, with the ECR even accounting for most mentions, followed by the EPP and Greens/EFA. Only political groups towards the edge of the political spectrum such as LEFT and ID have less mentions of space compared to the other groups.

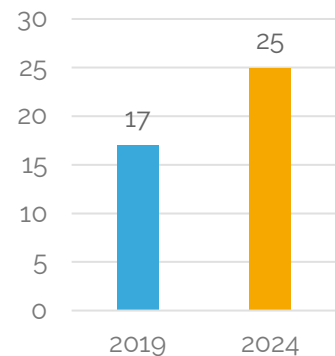


Figure 13: Space mention by European parties

Next to national parties, European parties also release their own manifestos. Between 2019 and 2024 **European parties increased their mentions of space by 47%, from 17 to 25 mentions.**¹² While this growth is impressive, it has to be noted that in 2019 all mentions came from one European party – the European Pirate Party, which also accounts for 19 out of 25 mentions in 2024. This **prohibits a broader generalised European trend** for European parties. Despite this, other European parties, in this case, the Renew, Green/EFA and EPP group, starting to mention space - even in Europe-wide manifestos - is a trend to watch out for in the analysis of future elections.

¹² As explained above, European parties and Groups in the EP are not synonymous. In the case of the EPP only one party (the EPP), that consists of national parties, constitutes the EPP group in the European Parliament. In other cases, such as Greens/EFA, national parties convene in multiple European parties, that then constitute a group in the European Parliament.



4.2 Framing space

As mentioned above, when aiming to understand the role of space in the context of the European Parliament election, it is important to consider not only how often space is mentioned in manifestos, but also to **which topics space is attached**. Analysing these framings gives insights into which topics political parties consider a priority when talking about space.

Although **space is not a top priority for voters explicitly** it is an increasingly important theme impacting societal issues, most prominently Europe's competitiveness, the ecological transition and the projection of European values in a changing geopolitical environment.¹³ Consequently, party manifestos that address these issues are today more likely to also mention space-based assets in supporting those policy priorities.

4.2.1 Framing by Manifestos' headlines

A first impression is given by the **headlines under which space is mentioned** within each manifesto, displayed in Figure 14. In the 2019 election, parties majorly link space to Economy (19 mentions), followed by Research (8 mentions), and Security & Defence (5 mentions). Interestingly, there are also 10 mentions within an entirely dedicated chapter to space, but this is solely done by the Czech Pirate Party mentioning multiple, also long-term, trends and developments in the space sector.

In 2024 the headlines that space is linked to have fundamentally changed. While **Economy (20 mentions)** still takes the top spot, its increase was only marginal. It is closely followed by **Security & Defence (18 mentions)**, which increased drastically, with **Innovation & Digital (10 mentions)** in third place with also a significantly stronger prevalence. Space as its own chapter is more limited in 2024 (6 mentions) and is still only done by one party, the Alternative Democratic Reform Party from Luxembourg.

Interestingly, **space increasingly is seen as an enabler of many policy sectors**. This is most notably in the realm of Security & Defence but can also be observed in areas that are more closely linked to the everyday lives of European citizens (Transport, Agriculture, Health, and Law enforcement). Even though mentions in the latter categories are rising, they remain niche for now.

Nevertheless, there is a clear shift as **political parties increasingly address space not as an isolated technological domain but as an integral component of Europe's economy, security, and innovation**. This suggests that **space policy is being intertwined with broader strategic goals** and should therefore be increasingly **addressed through a political prism, with the involvement of high-ranking political representatives** rather than ambitions being defined by a linear evolution of existing programmes. Such an evolution doesn't do justice to the multifaceted impact of space capabilities across the spectrum of acute policy priorities, from defence to competitiveness and from development cooperation to geopolitical strength.

Consequently, space policy must be adaptable and responsive to the dynamic needs of society, ensuring that Europe remains competitive, prosperous, secure and technologically advanced. By **embedding space policy within high-level political discourse**, Europe can better leverage its space capabilities to address complex challenges and seize emerging opportunities.

¹³ Rising prices and social inequality could decide the European elections: Exclusive poll, 2024 (Link)

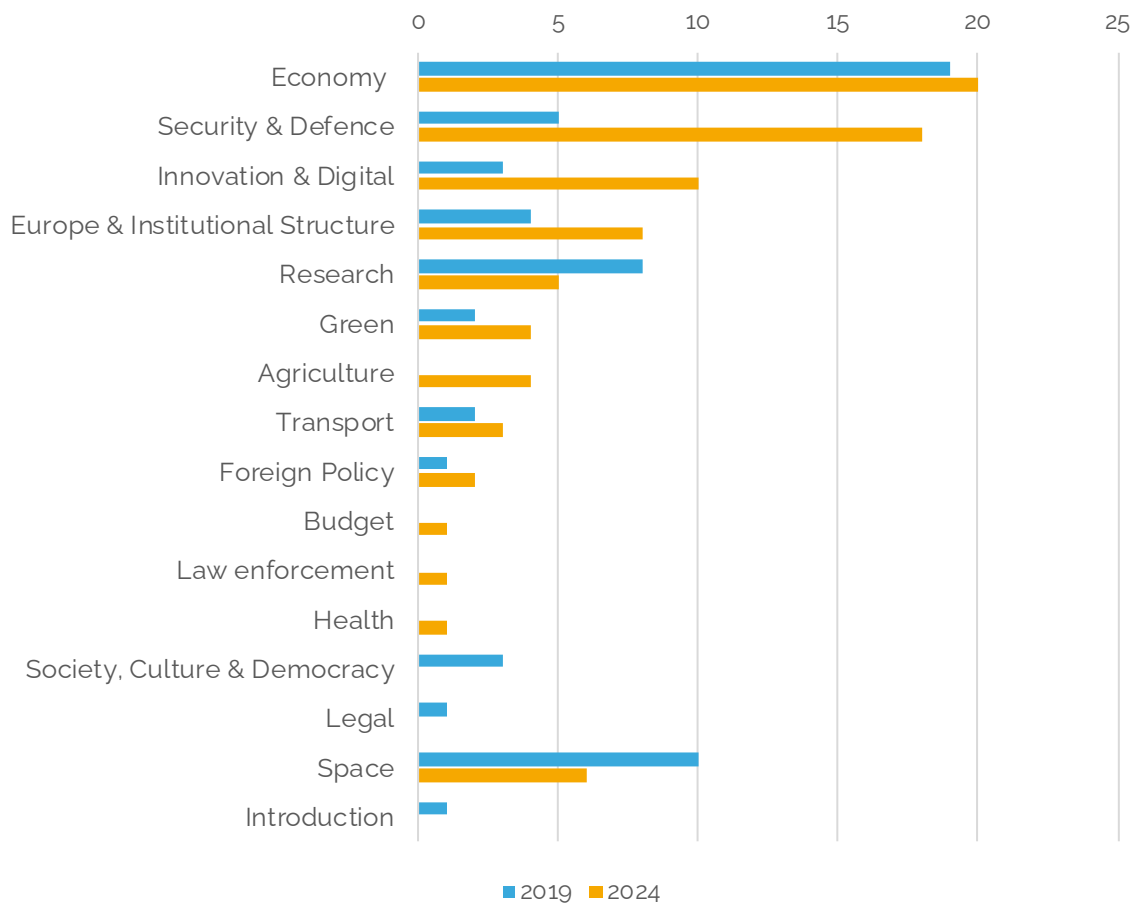


Figure 14: Space references by manifesto headlines

This **analysis of headlines can serve as a first broad overview** of the topics that parties connect to space. However, parties structure their manifestos very differently, with divergence in the number and meaning of headlines and subcategories within. Taking the case of Innovation, it can sometimes be part of a chapter addressing the Economy, other times part of Research while it can also be its own chapter.

4.2.2 Framing by ESPI2040 themes

Taking these structural biases into consideration, an additional analysis is conducted in order to categorise the mentions of space into domains that more structurally reflect the actual content of what is written in the manifestos.

For this, the **themes outlined in ESPI2040, the European Space Policy Institute’s vision for Europe in space**, are taken as a theoretical foundation, and its understanding of the space sector is applied to the mentions of space in party manifestos. ESPI2040 outlines 5 research themes: **Green & Sustainable Societies, Security & Defence, Exploration & Science, Space as an Asset, and Industry, Innovation, Finance & Workforce (IIFW)**. These are employed to provide a more fine-grained analysis of the framing of space mentions. Each section of the following analysis will briefly introduce the research topic, compare its prevalence in 2019 and 2024, and also give a few examples of the mentions of space.^{14,15}

¹⁴ A detailed rationale of ESPI2040 can be found in ESPI2040 (Link)

¹⁵ Each mention of space can fit either into one, two or more ESPI2040 themes.



Figure 15: Space mentions across ESPI2040 themes

In terms of absolute mentions, there has been an increase in almost all topics, comparing 2019 to 2024 in line with the general increase observed above. While in 2019, *IIFW* (22 mentions), *Space as an Asset* (19 mentions) and *Exploration & Science* (17 mentions) take the top spots, this **shifts in 2024 to Space as an Asset (33 mentions)¹⁶, Security & Defence (27 mentions), and IIFW (26 mentions).**

Complementing this with the relative changes, it can be seen that **application-oriented topics *Green & Sustainable Societies*, and especially *Security & Defence* have strongly risen in mentions**, as well as space as an Asset. *IIFW*, rises mildly in absolute terms, but is declining in relative metrics. *Exploration & Science* witnessed a decline, not only relatively but also in terms of absolute numbers. This further indicates that more priority is given to space as a tool to support the fight against urgent societal problems rather than a source of expanding human knowledge and exploring the universe.

In the rest of this chapter, these themes will be analysed in more detail to pinpoint which topics parties are linking space to exactly.

4.2.3 Green & Sustainable Societies

Green & Sustainable Societies refers to the **use of space for supporting Europe's climate and sustainability ambitions**, linking space with climate and sustainability policies, including the European Green Deal, and national energy and climate plans. Furthermore, it includes the **advancement of space services for energy, digital, mobility and agriculture policies** and mitigation of the ecological footprint of the space sector.

The use of space for *Green and Sustainable Societies* is naturally **mostly referred to by parties which are part of the Green/EFA group** in the European Parliament both in 2019 and 2024. This is also expected since green policies are one of the core issues that these parties address. Interestingly the main growth in mentions of space linked to green policies does not come from that group but from other groups such as the EPP, ECR and LEFT who did not, or only very limitedly, link space to climate and sustainability objectives in 2019. Nevertheless, given the parallel rise of competitiveness and security as topics of highest political relevance in 2024, the rise of climate & sustainability is seen as relatively weaker, despite clearly wider recognition compared to 2019.

¹⁶ Space as an Asset also concerns European space governance. The nature of European elections also focusing more on the supranational level of policymaking could structurally boost mentions of these topics.

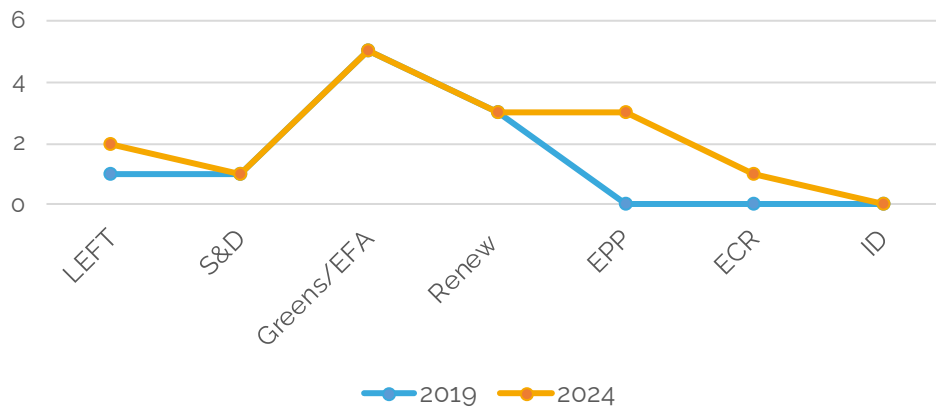


Figure 16: Mentions of Green & Sustainable Societies across EP groups

Mentions can be split broadly into two branches: the first refers to **space applications for climate and green endeavours**, with examples such as mitigating climate change, pollution detection as well as increasing the general knowledge of Earth and its biosphere. However, direct mentions of mitigating the effects of climate change remain limited both in 2019 and 2024. The second branch deals with **space applications in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens**, with use cases in a multitude of different sectors which include weather forecasting, road safety, internet access in remote areas, the digital workforce, urban transportation, and agriculture. As mentioned above, **2024 saw a rise in mentions related to the enabling function that space has on applications more directly connected to society and the everyday lives of citizens**, such as Transport, Agriculture and Health. In this regard the special enabling function of navigation systems, and GPS and Galileo specifically, is highlighted.

"Digitalisation can help to make agriculture more sustainable. For example, through GPS-controlled hoeing devices or in fertilisation."
(Bündnis go/die Grünen)

4.2.4 Security & Defence

Security & Defence encompasses the use of **space to protect European values**, as well as using space for **disaster management or protecting European space infrastructure** from attacks. This includes adoption of space solutions in disaster management and crisis response, uptake, and development of dual-use space solutions in support of European security and defence needs. Furthermore, it includes the security of the industrial supply chain, operations in space and ground infrastructure.

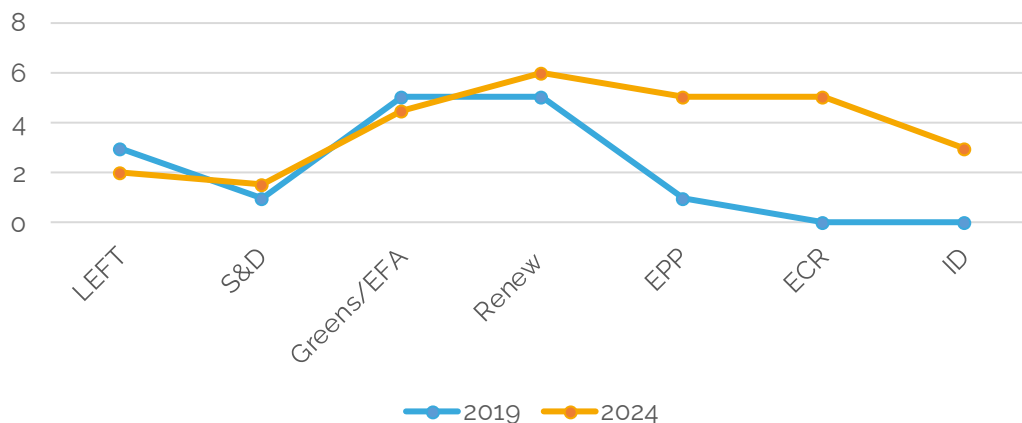


Figure 17: Mentions of Security & Defence across EP groups



In 2019, the link between space and *Security & Defence* is mostly made by parties from the Renew Group and by the Green/EFA group, in line with them being the group that also most often refers to space overall in 2019. However, looking at the *Security & Defence* related space mentions from 2024, a significant shift can be observed. In the manifestos of the upcoming election, **Space linked to Security & Defence is recognised almost equally throughout the entire political spectrum.** This includes a significant rise in attention by parties on the centre-right and right. The LEFT and S&D group tend to not link space to security and defence related matters that often.

“Strengthening the European Union's cyber defence and space capabilities to enable it to acquire genuine strategic autonomy in these areas”.

(Les Engagés)

In the realm of Security & Defence, space is in the 2019 election frequently referred to as tool for supporting specific policy goals, such as emergency management. The topic is also correlated with changes in European Space Governance: there are suggestions for a space organisation with a specific mandate in the realm of

Security & Defence, and more specific suggestions for the EDF to support space security, or an extended mandate for the European Union Satellite Centre (EUSC) to be allowed to share data with other security agencies. Other less frequent mentions include the strengthening of specific programmes (SSA, Govsatcom) as well as European sovereignty and protecting critical industries.

Mentions of space in relation to *Security and Defence* in 2024 can broadly be distributed into two categories. The first one concerns **space as a crucial tool for European autonomy**, especially mentioned in the context of Security and Defence. This encompasses building capabilities, often mentioned in connection to cyber capabilities, but also early detection, satellite monitoring and R&D talent. Other mentions of autonomy in connection with space, relate to Europe's ability to access and use space, especially for Security and Defence and the reliability of supply chains for satellite production. Interestingly there are two distinct mentions of reliance on the U.S. in terms of space capabilities, one regarding the dependence of European armies on GPS and the other about space-related goods being subject to U.S. arms control regulations.

The second major trend that can be identified is the **integration of space with security and defence policy**. The mentions refer to the use, or call for increased use, in areas such as disaster management, border surveillance or ship tracking. There are also more generic calls for an overall better integration of space and defence policies. With regard to these mentions a reoccurring theme is also that **space for security is an area where European cooperation is imperative**, also at the industrial level. Other themes with less resonance include the resilience of space-based assets, that are used for security and defence applications, and discussion regarding the military use of space also in connection with existing legal documents such as the Outer Space Treaty.

4.2.5 Exploration & Science

Activities regarding **Space Exploration and Science missions to inspire European citizens** and leading scientific discoveries are summarised in the *Exploration & Science* theme. It includes Space Exploration, missions on **LEO space stations as well as the Moon and Mars**, and Science Missions, to more distant targets and to **discover the mysteries of the Universe**. It also incorporates inspiring European citizens and leading scientific discoveries as well as creating stronger ties and societal cohesion between continents, nations, generations, and societal layers based on the inspirational dimension of space.

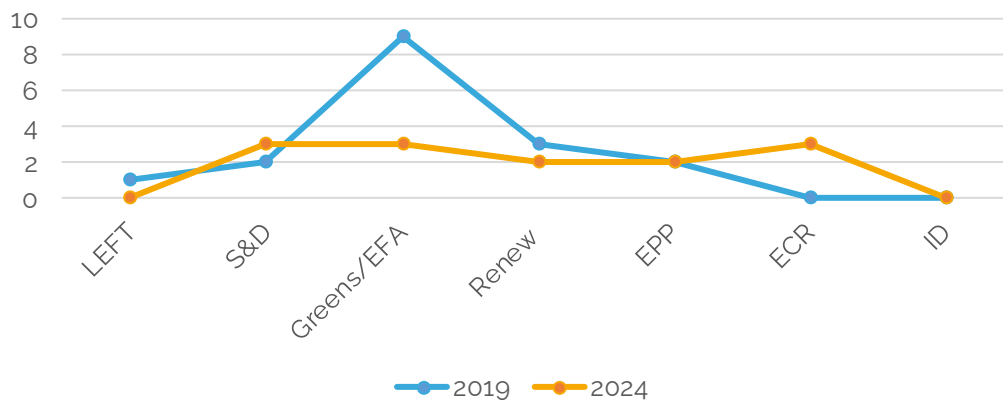


Figure 18: Mentions of Exploration & Science across EP groups:

Overall Exploration & Science was in 2019 almost entirely mentioned by Green/EFA, and especially the Czech Pirate Party. In 2024 this distribution is more equal but overall, on a much lower level. In fact, **Exploration & Science is the only topic that has been mentioned less in the current compared to the previous election.** This also reflects the analysis of the party headlines done in chapter 4.2.1., where space in 2024 is less often mentioned with headlines normally associated with Exploration & Science, such as Research or Society/Culture/Democracy. Furthermore, the EU itself not being active in the realm of space exploration and space science could contribute to parties not addressing these topics in an EP election. Finally, the fact that most priorities are crisis-driven (decline in competitiveness, climate, war) a more positive, exploration-related narrative is perhaps less politically palatable in view of party strategists.

In 2019 Exploration & Science was mentioned in relation to multiple different subtopics. A strong focus was put on the nexus between exploration and technologies, especially technological spinoffs and scientific discoveries stemming from exploration endeavours which could help citizens more directly.¹⁷ But also, partly the research and technology needed to develop exploration capabilities. In this regard increasing public

“From a Dutch, German and Belgian point of view, the candidacy of south Limburg as the location for the Einstein Telescope is a unique opportunity within the EU to link the regional knowledge economy with international science on a cross-border basis.”
(Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie)

funding for research programmes (like Horizon) is often associated with space exploration and science. There is even a specific linkage made between exploration and security with the suggestion of the European Defence Fund to make resources available for research into solar planes or resource extraction. Furthermore, space resources are a frequent topic. In this regard the Outer Space Treaty and its benefit sharing principle are mentioned. Additionally, the **inspirational power of exploration** and its benefits to international cooperation (for example through the ISS) are touched upon occasionally.

As mentioned above, **in 2024 less emphasis is paid on the Exploration & Science** aspect of space activities. A majority of mentions relate to the **Einstein Telescope and its economic, rather than scientific value** for Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Other mentions encompass the ESA astronaut programme as well as the legal status of resource exploitation in space and the call for a European mission to the Moon.

¹⁷ The terms *space* and *space exploration* are often used interchangeably which could lead to an overestimation of space exploration mentions in 2019.

4.2.6 Space as an Asset

Space as an Asset refers to **Europe's ability to access, protect and regulate space**. It includes National space laws, regulations and programmes, European space governance, as well as international space governance including international rule-setting in UN and other frameworks. Furthermore, it encompasses the developments in the European launch sector and questions of sustainability in space like the management of orbits.

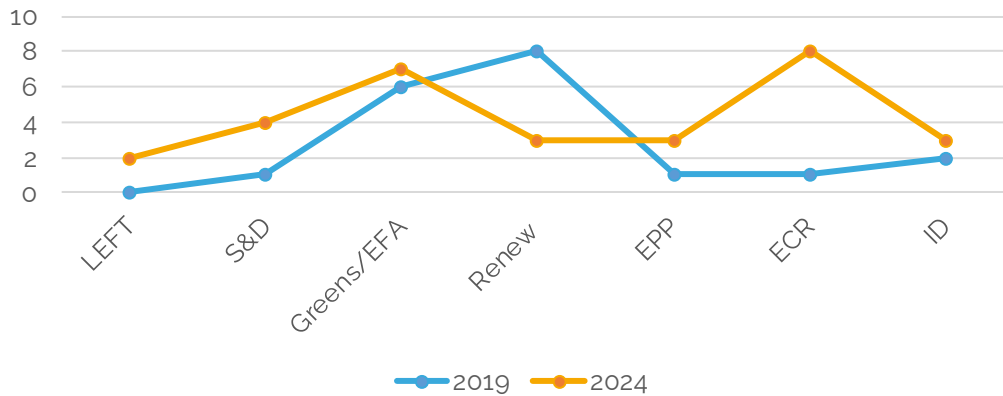


Figure 19: Mentions of Space as an Asset across EP groups

It can be seen that **mentions of Space as an Asset have in general increased throughout the entirety of the political spectrum**, except for the Renew group. Since this topic entails European space governance, it might be overrepresented in comparison to other topics as the nature of a European election, might incentivise party actors naturally to talk about how certain domains, in this case space, are governed in Europe.

Space is mostly framed as a success in 2019 and a clear advantage of European cooperation as an added value. Closely linked to this are ESA-EU relations, which are frequently mentioned. However, there is a clear difference in whether parties wish for more supranational (EU) governance and increased funding for its programmes (Galileo, Copernicus, EGNOS) or praise intergovernmental successes (Ariane, Airbus). Furthermore, parties suggest setting up additional EU agencies in the space domain with new competencies in fields such as *Security & Defence* or in monitoring near-Earth objects. Additionally, a share of mentions is dedicated to Europe's position in global governance and protecting space as a global common.

In 2024, the *Space as an Asset* theme majorly involves the **expression of support of ESA, European space governance, European cooperation in space matters more broadly, the EU space programme** and the need for a **European Space Act** more specifically. This also includes calls for closer cooperation between different space actors in Europe.

“Europe must raise its targets in this field, with effective coordination between the Commission, the European Space Agency and the Member States”.

(Aliança Democrática)

Additionally, there are some references to national space governance and a **fairly wide expression of support for national participation in ESA**. Another topic is the **autonomy of European capabilities and access to space**, often described together with *Security & Defence* applications, as already discussed in the dedicated chapter. Europe's need for **independent access to space**, Ariane 6 and the necessity for Europe to develop reusable launch systems in the future is also prominently covered, foremost by parties from France.

Furthermore, there is a moderate amount of mentions both for (i) space sustainability, the responsible management of orbits as well a call to ban Anti-satellite weapon (ASAT) tests, as well as (ii) occasional mentions of governance at the UN level regarding the use of space for resource extraction and the military use of space.

Mentions of specific actors and programmes are summarised in Figure 20 below.

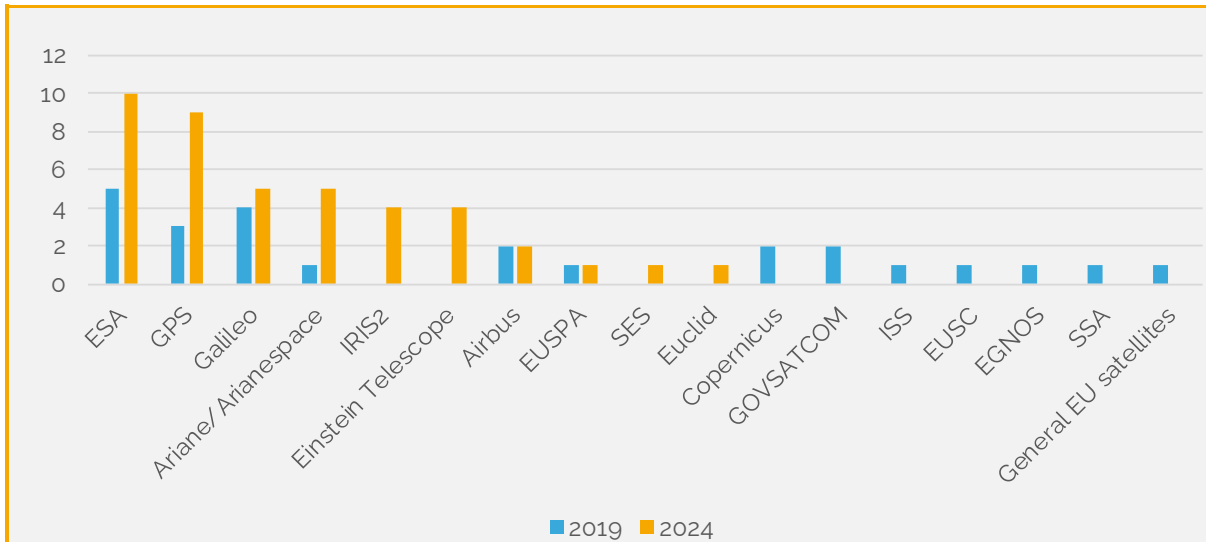


Figure 20: Mentions of specific space capabilities

Specific capabilities are mentioned more often in 2024 (42 times), compared to 2019 (25 times). This represents an **increase of 76%**, which is significantly stronger than the general increase in mentions (41%). This can be translated as European parties becoming more concrete and knowledgeable about space programmes and applications, instead of talking about the space sector more general.

Navigation applications (GPS, Galileo) are mentioned most often, as previously discussed, often related to its impact in especially *Green & Sustainable Societies*. Even though GPS is an U.S. system, it is the second most frequent specific capability mentioned by European parties in their manifestos. It remains unclear whether this is to be interpreted as a sign of dependence or simply parties using the terms “GPS” and “Navigation” interchangeably. However, it clearly indicates a lack of Europe marketing its own capabilities.

Furthermore, **mentions of ESA have increased**, often praising the organisation, its role in developing European space capabilities, and mentioning national membership as a model of success. More broadly, this can also be seen as the intergovernmental nature of ESA being recognised as valuable setup for national parties in EU member states. It is striking that they mention and support the organisation quite significantly even in light of supranational elections at EU level. While the increased uptake of ESA in political discussions highlights the growing importance of space in addressing societal problems, it also underscores the necessity for a strong collaboration and coordination between the different pillars of European space governance (national, intergovernmental, supranational).

Other notable mentions are the increased mentions of **Ariane** in relation to Europe temporarily losing its independent access to space and the proposed **third EU flagship space programme IRIS2** and. Furthermore, the **Einstein Telescope** is mentioned a few times, but rather as an economic project for Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, rather than its role in Space Science.

4.2.7 Industry, Innovation, Finance & Workforce

The **macroeconomic enablers of the space industry and its impact on the wider economy** of European states are put together in the ESPI2040 theme of *Industry, Innovation, Finance, Workforce (IIFW)*.

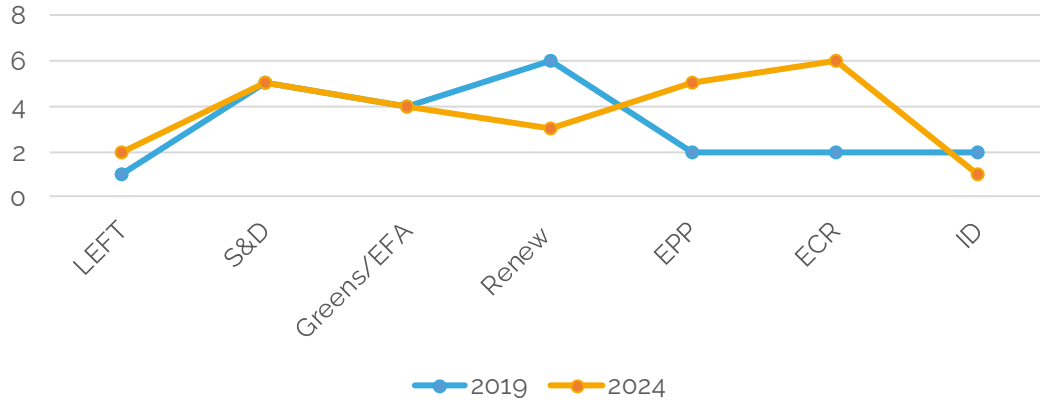


Figure 21: Mentions of IIFW across EP groups

Mentions regarding IIFW have been almost stationary, albeit on a high level, between 2019 and 2024 in terms of absolute numbers. However, there has been a shift in who mentions space in relation to this topic. While **the Renew Group had the most mentions in 2019, it fell off in 2024**. Mention for all other groups remained stationary (S&D and Greens/EFA) or increased (EPP and ECR).

In 2019 there is a clear difference in mentions in *IIFW* between public input into space and the output space generates for the public. A significant share of mention of *IIFW* revolves around more public funding for space and space research and innovation, with some calls for the protection of and **strengthening of the European industry space**. The output can be broadly split into (1) more general mentions of space contributing to the overall economic performance in terms of GDP and jobs as well as space contributing to regional economic development, especially for the case of Wallonia and (2) the size of the European space industry itself and the need to stimulate business opportunities in space and developing a space economy and space as a good opportunity for start-ups. Additionally, there are a few mentions of **EU funding for innovation as a driver of space activities** and space as an example of Industry 4.0.

These priorities shifted in 2024. There are many mentions of the **competitiveness of the European space industry** and how the industry can be further supported through public actors. **European cooperation is mentioned as a key building block** in that regard. As before there are also mentions of the **impact space can have on the wider economy**, but these mentions are more of general nature

"Space has become an economic factor. Due to technological advances and commercialisation, activities in space are no longer an issue for the distant future".

Pirate Party Luxembourg

in 2024. One specific case here is the economic impact of the Einstein Telescope on the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. Other minor topics identified are growth opportunities for European industry, the **need to better secure talent for the space sector**, and the **reliability of supply chains**. There are also a few mentions of space and space industry contributing to regional developments and the role of national companies in European projects.

Figure 22 below summarises **all space mentions across both ESPI2040 research themes and political groups** in the EP.

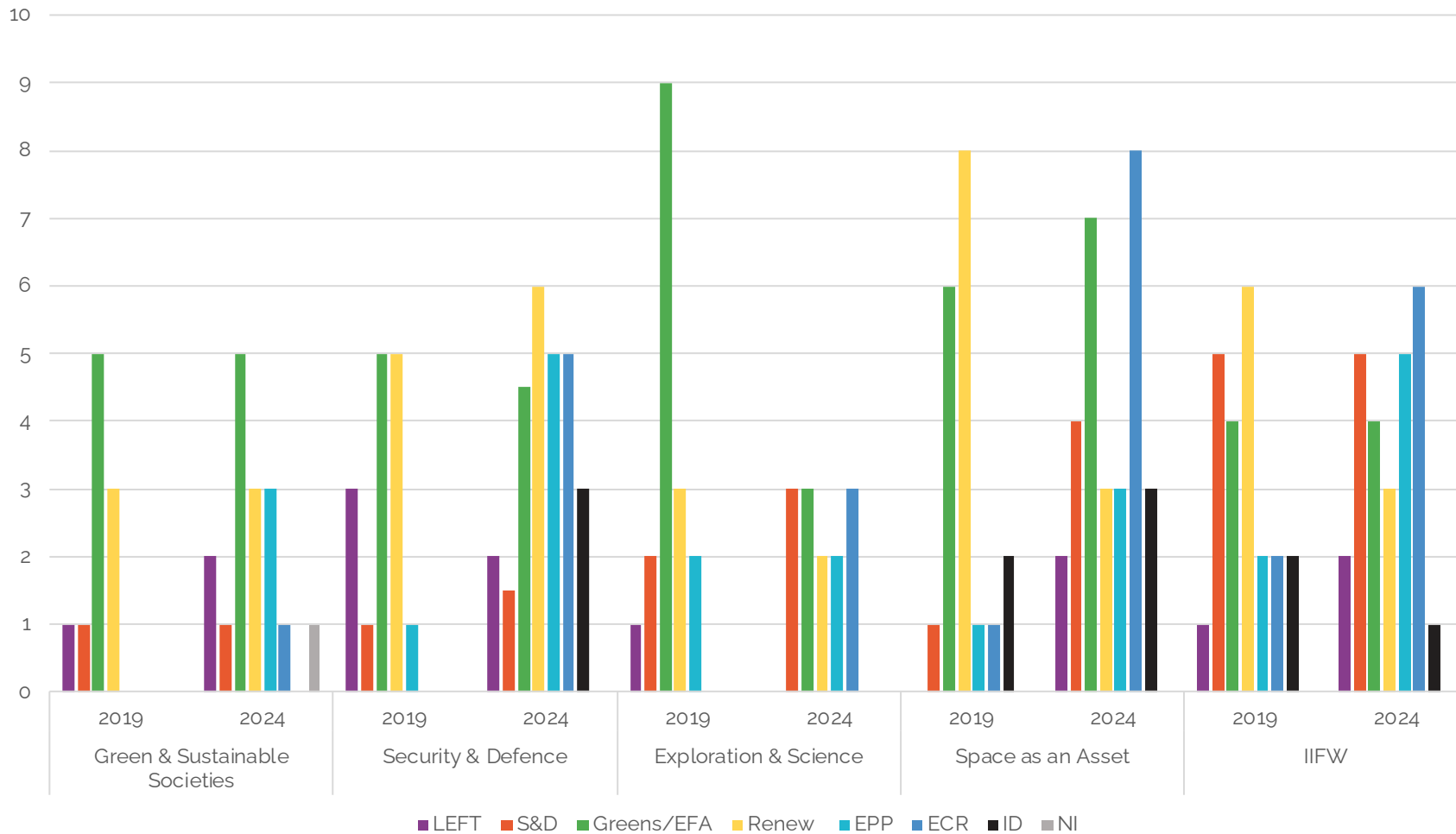


Figure 22: Space mentions across ESPI2040 themes and political groups in the EP



4.2.8 Negative mentions of space

However, mentions of space were not always 'positive', thus referring to a beneficial use of space assets and solutions. **In 2019, more 'negative' mentions related to both space exploration and the link and use of space for military purposes.** In these areas, Europe also currently lacks capabilities compared to other major space powers.¹⁸

Negative statements regarding space exploration indicate that **space receives too much attention compared to other fields that are related to sustainability** issues on Earth:

- "At a time when some imagine that machines will save us, that algorithms or transhumanism will replace us, or that the conquest of space will solve our problems, we say that our destiny is human and terrestrial. The human condition is not to destroy life on Earth, but to preserve it."
- "Nevertheless, we know more about the Moon and Mars than about the Earth's deep sea."

In 2019, there were also some mentions that especially **criticise the nexus between space and security**, specifically the use of civilian funds for military matters through the dual-use aspect of space:

- "Major EU investment programmes such as aerospace projects and the European Interconnection Mechanism (EIM) are increasingly linked to defence and security. [...] We are opposed to this."
- "The EU is also militarising civilian programmes, such as investment in the transport sector, mobility infrastructure for tanks or IT security programmes supported by funds for digital development or the space programme."
- "The EU must also extend disarmament measures to new areas of warfare - such as the internet, space and autonomous weapons systems."

In 2024, even though the total amount of space-related mentions has increased by 41%, **negative mentions have decreased** from five to four. Mentions here also include disapproval of space interests that are to the detriment of Earth's problems:

- "[We need] a global initiative to combat the development of space tourism flights."

The **militarisation of space is also criticised**:

- "We put the European space programme at the service of social and environmental challenges. We reject space militarisation. Secure connectivity programmes are not intended to facilitate military operations outside Europe."
- "We also want stronger commitments against militarisation of space and a code of conduct against digital warfare."

A final form of criticism comes from the angle of **space as a tool for surveillance**, in this specific case, in agriculture:

- "Farmers should not permanently be monitored, certainly not from the air (satellite images or drones)."

¹⁸ Negative mentions refer to statements opposing a certain use case of space, a certain type of space application or the use of space in general.; Marco Aliberti, Ottorino Cappelli and Rodrigo Praino, *Power, State and Space*, Vienna, Springer, 2023.



5 MEP SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

The use of the manifesto as a primary tool to address citizens is gradually **leaving space for more engaging social media interaction**. Indeed, one characteristic aspect of these EP elections is the late release of many parties' manifestos, to a level that even three weeks before the elections about one-third of the potentially elected parties have not yet released a manifesto. Furthermore, party manifestos are usually decided on by party delegates in a top-down approach, leaving citizens as passive consumers, while on social media ordinary voters can step in and directly communicate with MEPs.

Due to this, **social media is generally a platform for shorter statements, usually more focused on key messages**. However, social media also brings the added benefit of metric data, i.e., likes, retweets, replies, etc., facilitating an overview of how engaged citizens are with certain topics. The static use of manifestos does not provide this opportunity.

5.1 Social Media as a Tool of Political Communication

Social media posts now provide a **direct link for MEPs or candidates to interact with their followers**, and (by extension, the general electorate), also implying the creation of a personal platform to **share their views independently from their party**, and to participate in trending news and discussions, particularly on X. Despite the more passive initial phase of engagement, this mode of communication allows for debates and replies to voters' concerns, potentially facilitating a greater feeling of **voter connection to parliamentarians**, and again fostering a more personal interaction than the release of manifestos.

In this chapter, **space mentions in MEP social media statements** were analysed, specifically in the run-up to the European Parliament elections. Noting the particular role that X plays in facilitating short MEP statements and dialogue, as well as its popularity amongst MEPs as a form of communication (over 90% of current MEPs have active X accounts¹⁹), X was chosen as the statements' source. In choosing to analyse the statements of all incumbent MEPs in the months before the election, the results would give an **indication both of the size of the general conversation surrounding space, and the salience of the issue for their parties and voters**.

To do this, any MEP tweets, excluding retweets, quote tweets, and replies, were collected from February to April 2024 for all active MEP accounts. The research encompassed a search for space-related terms using the same dictionary used to analyse the manifestos.

5.2 Space in MEP Posts

Over this period, **space played a small role in the conversation**, with less than 100 posts identified mentioning space, from less than 10% of all MEPs. Despite overall post rate from many MEPs being quite high, space-related conversation, even if only incidental or secondary subject matter, appears to be quite limited.

This can be interpreted as a reflection of MEPs considering other issues, that they feel are more closely linked to the everyday lives of citizens, as more important in the run-up to an election.

¹⁹ ESPI Database

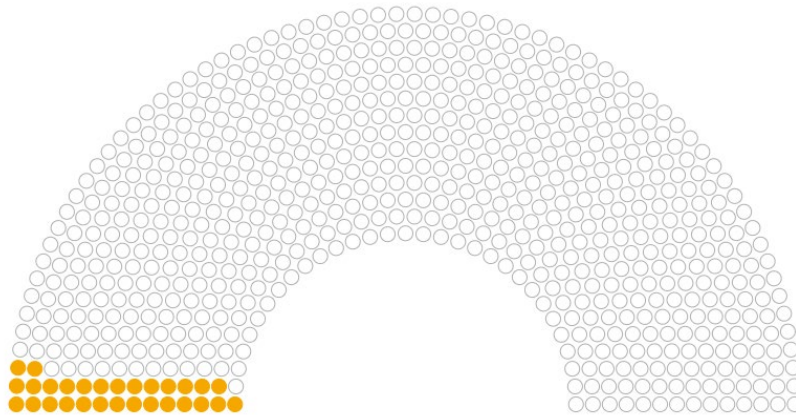


Figure 23: Number of MEPs posting about Space on X (Feb-April 2024) out of all MEPs with active X accounts²⁰

Reflection can also be provided on a national level, as by identifying the highest-scoring countries, further insights could be gleaned on national interest in space brought to the European stage by national representatives. In this context, **two countries stood out as top tweeters about space – France and Germany**, making up just over 50% of this conversation combined.

Additionally, two MEPs from France and Germany also contributed 37% of all tweets. This is somewhat unsurprising, as both countries are major contributors to the European space ecosystem: in 2023 they provided just over 40% of ESA's total budget between them, and French and German companies such as Arianespace and Airbus Defence and Space are often noted as some of the most influential in the sector.²¹

It is also necessary to highlight that **France, Germany, Poland and Spain** (the countries with most space mentions) are four of the five countries with the most MEP seats in parliament.

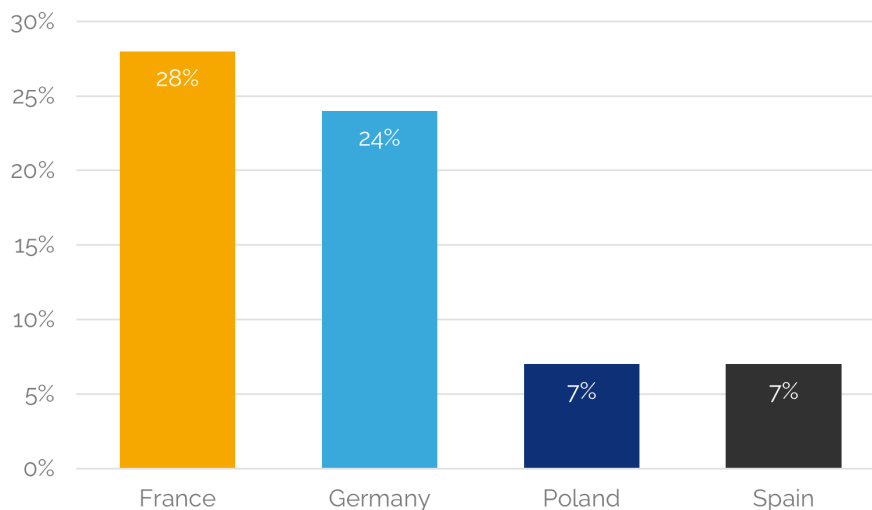


Figure 24: Top space tweeting countries on X relative to all tweets.

Interestingly, **representatives from countries that are well represented in the analysis of the manifestos** such as Belgium or Luxembourg **do not post about space**, signalling a difference in

²⁰ Figure created using Flourish studio. (Link)

²¹ ESA budget 2023, 2023 (Link); Top 6 Space Companies In Europe [Categorized By Sector], 2023 (Link) The current structure of the European space manufacturing sector, 2021 (Link)



communication. Although it must be noted, that due to the overall low number of space-related posts, generalisations might be difficult to derive.

However, it is important to consider, for both the general and national reflections, that post collection did not include May, the month directly before the election. It is likely that candidates could change both the frequency and content of their statements during this final month as a last push for potential voters. As such, if space is on their agenda or is seen as a salient issue for their voters, this could be the month of the largest conversation.

It is also relevant to analyse the **affiliation of tweeting MEPs in terms of European Parliament political groups**, as barring a few isolated cases, all parties have declared in advance which political groups they will join, and over 75% of MEPs who have posted have declared their intention to run again. Thus, by aligning MEP tweets with their affiliated group, the salience of space as an issue for that group could be noted. Figure 25 below shows that **MEPs in the Greens/EFA and Renew Europe groups have tweeted the most about space overall**, with the highest percentage of MEPs relative to seat counts. In line with relative seat counts, the LEFT and NI groups tweet about space the least. Interestingly, although the S&D and EPP parties have the current highest seat counts, their relative number of MEPs tweeting about space is low.

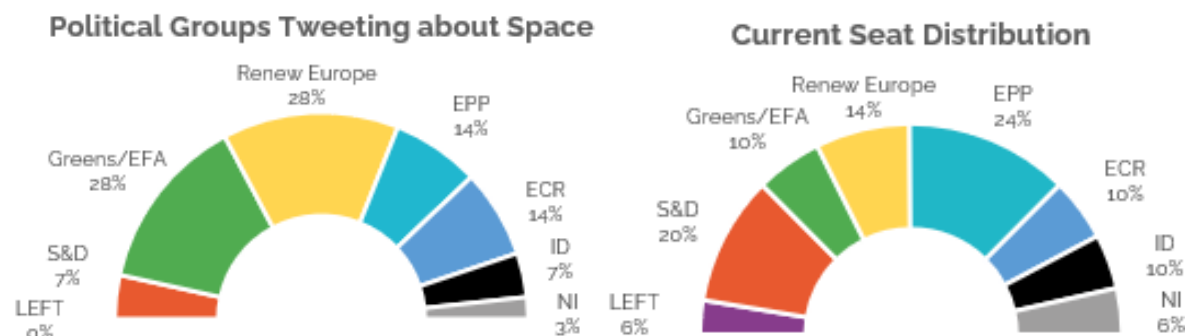


Figure 25: MEPs tweeting about space by political group (left) and current seat distribution of parties (right). Percentages rounded to nearest whole number.

This distribution of MEPs social media statements across political groups suprisingly **aligns more with the mentions of space in the 2019 manifestos, than the 2024** ones. From this limited tweet data, it appears as if **mentioning space in their manifesto almost seems like a precursor** to MEPs tweeting about space later on.

The **context of these tweets** is also important to understand the depth of the conversation around space by these MEPs, and how this **conversation may align to their political priorities**. Although the tweets seem to cover a wide range of themes, some posts are not political statements but instead seem to suggest an individual interest in space. For example, a tweet congratulating the new ESA astronaut graduates. Other tweets, however, do seem to address political priorities, with Figure 26 categorising their context by ESPI2040 themes. Generic in this context implies the tweet addressed space as a talking point, but in no specific circumstances. **Space as an Asset was the most touched upon topic, present in approximately 50% of all tweets**, followed by *Security & Defence* (30%), *Green & Sustainable Societies* (28%), *Industry, Innovation, Finance & Workforce* (15%), and *Exploration & Science* (13%).

Notably, *Green & Sustainable Societies* are mentioned in all posts by the S&D party, with the highest percentage mentioned by Greens/EFA. Renew Europe posts place their focus on *Security & Defence*, and *Space as an Asset*. More specifically, **the Copernicus Programme and the EU Space Law** stood out as top topics, with the former mentioned in contexts such as its data being a "wake-up call for all of us" around global warming, and its wider benefits for EU climate policies.



For the EU Space Law, many posts focused on elements that should be considered for inclusion, particularly related to science, and sustainability, for example: "The law is also intended to protect the space assets we use daily and make space projects more sustainable and space travel safer".

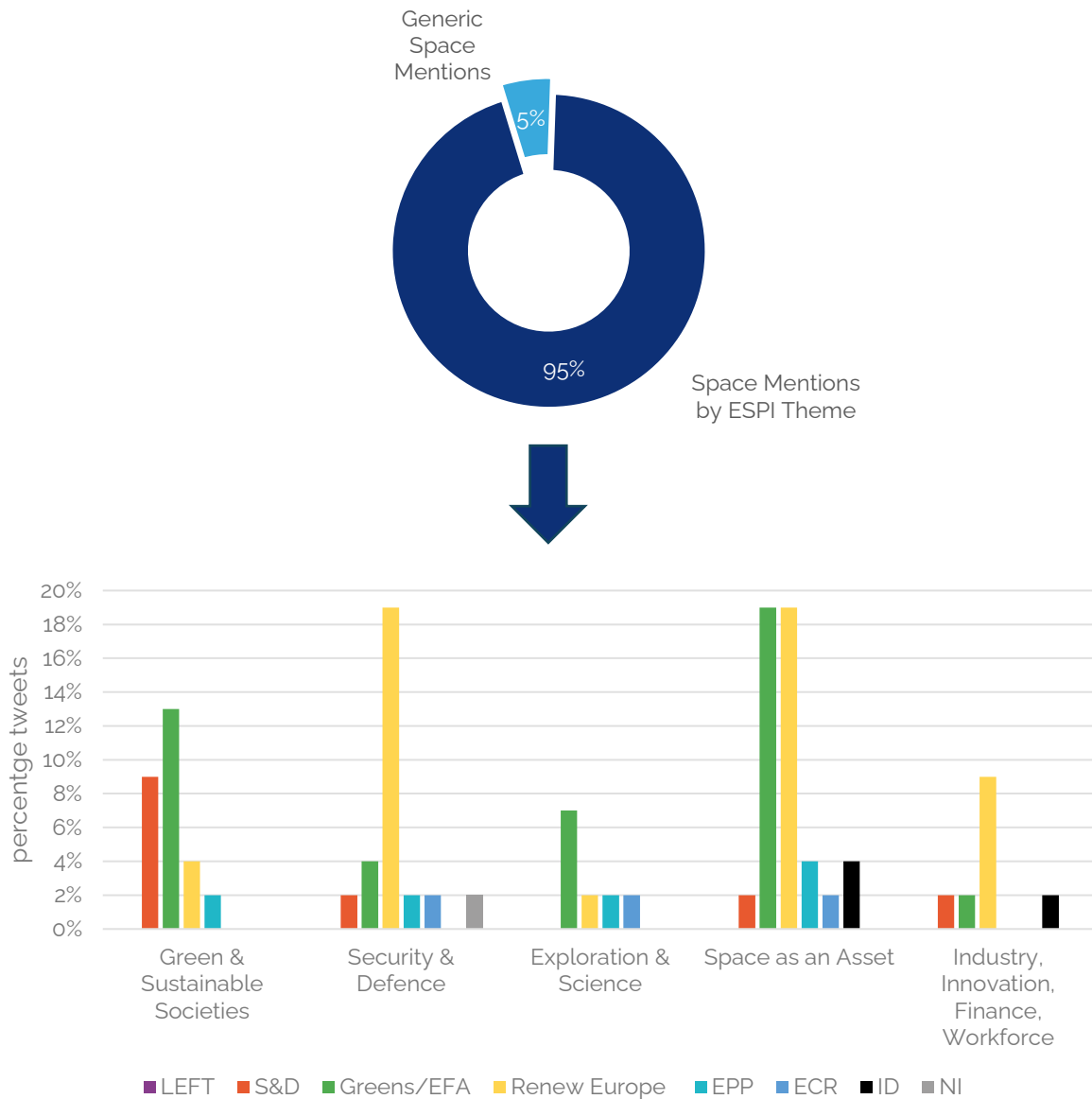


Figure 26: Tweet context by ESPI Theme grouped by current political groups of posting MEPs.

Finally, by collecting **engagement metrics of tweets**, insights can also be provided into **the top tweets by voter concern, or voter general interest**. Figure 26 provides this analysis, showing the average engagement of all tweets by ESPI2040 theme (i.e., the sum of all likes, retweets and replies divided by total tweets for that theme) plotted against percentage tweets addressing that theme. Bubble size indicates the sum of follower counts of all MEPs posting about that theme.

Although **the least number of tweets are about IIFW and Exploration & Science, they capture most of the attention**. In particular, for Exploration & Science, MEPs posting in this context had the lowest follower numbers combined, and the least number of posts, but still the second highest



level of engagement, suggesting the ongoing power of science and exploration to inspire the public.

Furthermore, the **high levels of engagement for the IIFW theme** (with the majority of posts being related to industry) could suggest a high level of follower appreciation for the impact and benefits of the sector. Specifically, the post with the most engagement addressed the theme of Industry, Innovation, Finance and Workforce, specifically calling the French aerospace industry “the pride of Europe”. The post with the second highest engagement addressed a programme to include in the European Space Law to collect and analyse data on UAPs in a “transparent and public way”.

ESPI Theme - Bubbles Indicate Total Follower Numbers of MEPs Tweeting about that Theme

- Green & Sustainable Societies
- Security & Defence
- Exploration & Science
- Space as an Asset
- Industry, Innovation, Finance & Workforce

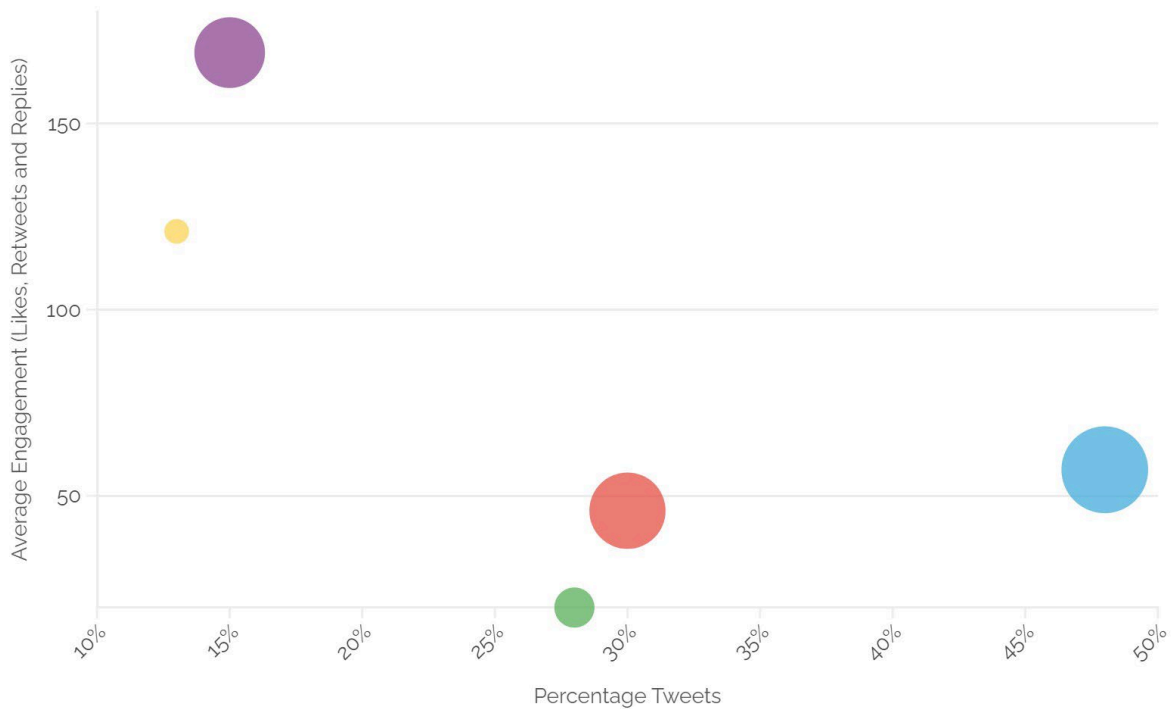


Figure 27: Average engagement of X posts (sum of likes, retweets and replies divided by number of posts) against percentage posts related to that ESPI theme. The bubble size indicates the sum of MEP follower numbers for that theme. Figure created using Flourish studio.



6 THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT LEGISLATING SPACE

On top of their social-media statements and electoral declarations, MEPs bring forward their views during **EP hearings**, available publicly, thus concretely impacting EU policymaking and legislative action. The 2019-2024 legislature saw a significant number of space-related topics being addressed by the EP, starting from the second reading of the **EU Space Programme regulation**, which had already been scrutinised by the EP in 2018 for the first reading, and including the **establishment of the additional Secure Connectivity component**. Moreover, topics such as STM or space for security and defence were addressed as part of a wider debate happening at the EU level and resulting in the release of joint communications on these topics by EU institutions, notably EC and HR/VP.

In view of this fact, this chapter will delve deeper into the latest activity of the MEPs in a selected number of cases when space-related proposals or other documents were discussed. The analysis highlights the **key messages and concerns of each political group of the EP** whose MEPs participated in the debates to clarify their policy direction and agenda. **Vote results** for the item that underwent the voting procedure are also provided by political group (*for, against, abstentions*).

6.1 Proposal establishing the Union Space Programme and the European Union Agency for the Space Programme

The EU Space Programme covers all EU-funded space activities in the fields of Earth Observation, Navigation, Telecommunications, Research, and Innovation. In 2018, a regulation was proposed and presented to the EU Parliament for the **establishment of a space programme under which existing activities (Copernicus, Galileo, EGNOS) could be grouped**.

Notable Statements:

EPP: Stressed the necessity to continue and expand activities with Copernicus, Galileo, and EGNOS. Highlighted the importance of space for resilience in other sectors.

S&D: Addressed the underfunding of GOVSATCOM and SSA. Stressed the importance of downstream applications and the need to invest in SMEs, as well as the prioritisation of civil security over military matters.

Greens/EFA: Importance of open data and need to correlate ESA budget to regional funds as well.

EFDD:²² Called for support of their amendment on Copernicus coverage of ground subsidence, which was largely rejected.

ECR: Raised questions on whether the EU should open its programme to third countries, such as the UK. Makes recommendations for open use of capabilities not put in service of militarisation or profitability.

ALDE:²³ Expressed concern over how applied data may have negative effects on societies and iterated the importance of data standardisation.

Vote Results			
500, 43, 18			
EP group	+	-	0
EPP	170	3	0
S&D	147	1	0
ECR	34	19	2
ALDE	54	1	0
EFDD	19	15	0
ENF	6	3	11
Left group	10	21	5
Greens/EFA	38	0	0
NI	5	5	1

²² The group only existed between 2014 and 2019.

²³ Now Renew Europe



6.2 Recommendation for Second Reading on the Space Programme 2021-2027 and European Union Agency for the Space Programme

This proposal had as main objective to **strengthen the existing EU space programme** and address the increasing requirements needed for the expansion of EU activities in space. The proposal offers an integrated programme covering Copernicus, Galileo, and EGNOS, but also includes newer GOVSATCOM and SSA programmes. The proposal was approved without vote.

Notable Statements:

EPP: Highlighted the importance of innovation through the space sector and its effects on strengthening European resilience. Stressing the need to strengthen strategic autonomy and support SMEs, they highlighted the programme's value with respect to European competitiveness and prestige.

S&D: Praised prior EU achievements in climate security, biodiversity, and satellite services for EU citizens. While supporting the funding of technology for data and services and expressing certainty that the programme will foster growth, concerns were raised about potential militarisation.

Greens/EFA: Called for more cooperation with ESA, the Greens stressed the need to develop an EU Space Law superseding national law and to promote international free use of space for all.

Renew Europe: Stressed the essentiality of the space sector for Europe's future. More ambition is needed in defence and security as well as in the launcher industry.

Left Group: Concern for the direction taken in terms of militarisation. Calls for more international cooperation.

6.3 Proposal Establishing the Union Programme for Secure Connectivity 2023-2027

The EU proposal for the Union Programme for Secure Connectivity (IRIS²) was passed in the context following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, cited numerous times during the debates. IRIS² establishes itself as a solution to **communication security for both governments and citizens** keeping spatial and environmental sustainability in mind.

Notable Statements:

EPP: Stated their full support for the programme, and relief in European determination in addressing matters of Russian aggression and Chinese encroachment. Stressed the importance that some funding be reserved for SMEs.

S&D: Statements supporting the project for considering a context of war, disasters, and climate change. Suggests making the Black Sea area a region of primary focus for the programme.

Greens/EFA: Welcome the programme and its importance but express disappointment over the rejection of the Greens amendment for an affordable Secure connectivity programme.

Renew Europe: Supports programme, stresses its use for strategic autonomy as well as its potential impact on demographic policies.

Vote Results			
555, 13, 81			
EP group	+	-	0
EPP	161	0	0
S&D	136	0	0
Renew	96	0	0
ECR	57	1	0
ID	41	8	10
Left group	29	0	4
Greens/EFA	2	0	4
NI	33	4	2



6.4 EU Approach to Space Traffic Management

In the context of an increasingly congested space, **the issue of space traffic management and space debris** was addressed by parliament. The joint communication was approved without vote, highlight the imperative of swift action as a mean to guarantee the safety and sustainability of space capabilities.

EPP: Supports suggested approach, raises points on SMEs and EU competitiveness and the importance of addressing space debris.

S&D: Welcomes investment as a means to find space traffic, congestion, and collision risk solutions. Concern for delays and calls for faster implementation given the Ukraine War context.

Greens/EFA: Supports resolution but calls for binding standards and advocates for a renewed international law. Concern over Chinese expansionism in terms of debris management. Asks for Commission intentions regarding destructing ASAT weapon testing and calls for a pledge to ban it.

Renew Europe: Supports project, calls for the commission to propose binding legislation by 2024.

6.5 Report on the Strategic Compass and EU Space-Based Defence Capabilities

Given the increasing importance of space as a tool in line with EU principles of strategic autonomy, the European Parliament welcomed the findings proposed by the **EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence**. Debate participants discussed five key priorities: protection of systems, threat response, competitiveness and investments, governance, and cooperation.

Notable statements:

S&D: Show support for the programme but state that space is a sector for collaboration and not militarisation. The update of international treaties is necessary and so is the need for EU strategic autonomy in a peaceful space.

Greens/EFA: While space should not be militarised, the security of space assets and projects must be guaranteed, therefore a security strategy is in order. European capabilities and tools must not be in the hand of businesses or single individuals as they are increasingly so in the U.S.

Renew Europe: Stresses the need to protect space assets and calls for serious defence and security strategy. Suggests that more efforts be put in the production of SST data, development of an effective European launcher strategy, and creation of an EU space law.

Vote Results			
500, 43, 18			
EP group	+	-	0
EPP	142	0	0
S&D	104	0	0
Renew	85	0	0
ECR	31	11	0
ID	31	11	4
Left group	1	23	6
Greens/EFA	57	0	0
NI	29	5	3

ID: States its appreciation for the autonomy established by the text and hopes for greater independence from the U.S. and Russia. Stresses the importance of safeguarding data but warns against commission takeover of dual use capabilities and the intelligence sector.



7 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Overall mentions in manifestos

- **The absolute number of space mentions rose by 41%**, from 59 to 83, indicating a growing importance of space issues to political actors.
- Parties most frequently **address space under the headings of Economy, Security & Defence, and Innovation & Digital**. With Security & Defence accounting for the strongest increase. **Space increasingly is seen as an enabler of many policy sectors**. Especially in Security & Defence but also in other areas that are closer to the everyday lives of European citizens.
- **Space is the third most highlighted technological sector** in party manifestos, surpassed only by AI/ML and Batteries.
- **ESA is frequently mentioned**, which highlights the importance of the agency's intergovernmental setup to national actors even within a supranational context.

Manifesto mentions by country and political group

- In 2024, **space mentions in manifestos are concentrated in the Benelux countries** and those with a traditionally strong presence in the upstream sector namely **Germany and France**.
- The **number of parties mentioning space remains almost constant**, increasing slightly from 25 to 29, translating to a **stationary share of 20% of parties mentioning space**.
- Although the concentration remains high, the distribution across parties is more balanced. In 2019, the top 5 parties accounted for 63% of mentions, while in 2024, only 42% of mentions came from these parties, indicating **space being recognised by more diverse set of parties**.
- In 2019, most parties referring to space in their manifestos belonged to centrist and centre-left political groups, together accounting for 80% of space mentions. **By 2024, space mentions are more evenly distributed across the political spectrum**, with a notable increase in mentions by right-leaning groups.

Manifesto mentions by ESPI2040 topics

- Structured by ESPI2040 research themes, **all topics have seen an increase in absolute mentions, except for Exploration & Science**, which decreased significantly.
- The **strongest rise in mentions is observed in the context of space-related Security & Defence** issues. While in 2019, this topic was primarily mentioned by the Green/EFA and Renew groups, **it is now prevalent across almost the entire political spectrum**. In terms of the absolute numbers of mentions, the topic ranks second behind Space as an Asset.
- **Navigation (both GPS and Galileo) is the most frequently mentioned application**, especially in relation to Green & Sustainable Societies.

Social Media Analysis

- **Space plays a limited role in social media discussions** leading up to the elections, concentrated among a few accounts and countries. Fewer than 100 tweets mentioned space, from less than 10% of all MEPs, with France and Germany accounting for 50% of all space mentions.
- **Space as an Asset is the most frequently discussed topic**, present in approximately 50% of all tweets, albeit the analysis also coincided with the delay of the EU Space Law.
- Although **IIFW and Exploration & Science** are the least mentioned topics in tweets, they **capture the most attention** regarding key engagement metrics.



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ANNEXES

Annex A: Extended Methodology

The manifestos for 2019 were collected using the GESIS database for the European Parliament Elections.²⁴ The 2024 manifestos were manually collected on the individual party websites. In this case, if PDF versions were not available, the manifesto text was copied from the website and a PDF was created. To decide which parties (and thus manifestos) to include in the analysis, a threshold of 4% percent was used. As can be seen in Figure 28, there are many different electoral thresholds in Europe, with 4% as a median value. This makes sure all major parties are captured, whilst also not artificially inflating the party count for certain countries without thresholds. Polling data was extracted from EuropeElects²⁵ and Politico Poll of Polls²⁶.

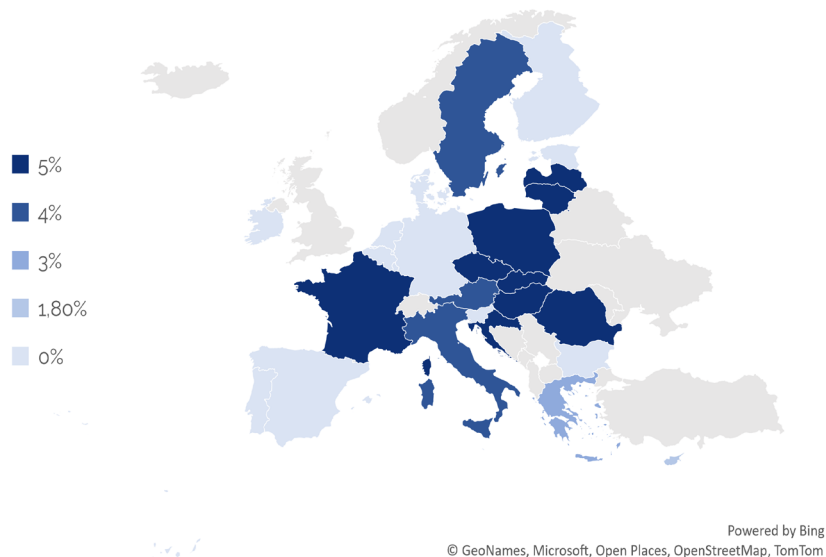


Figure 28: Electoral thresholds throughout Europe based on an overview provided by the European Parliament Research Service²⁷

It is also important to note that the manifestos from Belgium, both for 2019 and 2024, are used for regional, national, and European elections, which makes them very elaborate. All manifestos were translated using the translation tools DeepL²⁸ and Google Translate²⁹. DeepL was the primary translation tool. However, as a limited number of languages are available in the tool, Google Translate was used to translate those remaining. These were Luxembourgish, Croatian, Maltese, Catalan, and Galician. In some cases, the PDFs contained texts within images, and so the python package pytesseract³⁰, an optical character recognition tool, was used to extract the text before translation. In a few rare cases, Google Translate was used instead of DeepL, even if translation was

²⁴ European Parliament Elections – Euromanifesto Study (Documents 2019), 2019 (Link)

²⁵ EuropeElects (Link)

²⁶ POLITICO Poll of Polls (Link)

²⁷ Electoral thresholds for the 2024 European elections, 2024 (Link)

²⁸ DeepL (Link)

²⁹ Google Translate (Link)

³⁰ PyPI (Link)



technically possible using DeepL. This was in the case of a bad DeepL translation, or images extracted poorly from text.

To process the manifesto documents, several python functions were used, along with the NLP tool spaCy³¹. First, the text of the manifesto was cleaned to catch common issues encountered in reading PDF text, such as unwanted spaces or hyphenated words running onto new lines. Then one of spaCy's core, trained NLP models (en_core_web_sm) was used to process the text, which is a small pipeline trained on written web text.³² The space and technology dictionary terms were subsequently identified as words in the text using the spaCy PhraseMatcher class³³, which allows for efficient matching of large terminology lists, regardless of e.g. the case of the word. Sentences in the manifesto containing these matches were then outputted to an excel file, along with the page number, to be analysed manually. Steps were also taken to reduce the output of non-space-related mentions by compiling a list of selected phrases to be automatically excluded from the matched output, e.g. public space, living space, airspace, etc. The **output was then manually cross-checked and sorted** by country, party and context, and analysed as shown in the relevant sections above. The same method was employed to **search for mentions of innovative technology developments** within the manifestos, instead with a manually compiled dictionary of technology words split into the following ten themes: artificial intelligence (AI) & machine learning (ML), quantum technology, semiconductors, nuclear, batteries, robotics, big data, internet of things (IOT), bitcoin & crypto. No exclusion phrases were included for this section.

The keywords used for the 10 technology topics were identified using a mixture of manual research on the topics, and the use of generative AI.³⁴ Some broad criteria were initially applied to all technology mentions found using the NLP technique described above. These were:

- All duplicate mentions were removed if they belonged to the same topic and had the same context, e.g., if batteries are mentioned twice in one sentence but in the same context, this is included as one mention.
- Sentences mentioning the technology in a negative way were still included.

For certain topics, the criteria were narrowed down even further:

- **AI & ML:** Mentions of robots were only included in this topic if in the context of autonomy, 'killer robots' or mentioned with AI.
- **Nuclear:** Only mentions of positive nuclear technology were included such as nuclear research, nuclear fusion, or beneficial uses, e.g. in medicine. Mentions of nuclear weapons or nuclear fission reactors were excluded.
- **Batteries:** Mentions were only included in this category if they pertained to energy storage batteries/systems or smart/super grids. Any mention of batteries for electric transportation was excluded.

X data pulled included name of the MEP, text of the post, date, time of creation (UTC), and several post metrics (including likes, retweets and replies). Follower numbers were also extracted for all active MEPs on X using the X API. This was done at the end of each collection month in order to obtain the most up to date information. Complete post data for each month was collected, translated, and exported for each country individually. The same dictionary for space-related words

³¹ spaCy (Link)

³² spaCy Models (Link)

³³ spaCy PhraseMatcher (Link)

³⁴ ChatGPT (Link)



and phrases (including phrases to exclude) and method was then used on these posts to search for space-related mentions. The final output was similarly coded and analysed.

The post data was collected for each month at the start of the next so that metrics could adequately be reflected for posts on the last day of that month. X handles and party details for each MEP were collected using web scraping techniques, and double checked manually. Any replicated posts with mentions of space, i.e. replicated in different languages by the author, were also not included. Note, that in the particular case of Roberta Metsola, the European Parliament President, posts were collected both from her personal and presidential X accounts. Any posts not in English were translated using DeepL and Google Translate based on the same reasoning for the manifesto translations above.

Further notes:

- It should be noted that mentions of space only refer to direct mentions of a space capabilities, programmes, institutions or use cases. Indirect references, such as "Europe should increase funding for research into new technologies" were not counted and/or analysed although they might implicitly also include the space sector.
- Another point of note is that bigger parties, from more populous countries also tend to have more resources disposable to draft bigger and more elaborate manifestos. Therefore, they might have more space allocated to topics that are not in the primary interest of ordinary citizens, like space.
- Mentions of alliances of parties that join more than one group in the EP have been split accordingly.
- The cutoff date for the inclusion of manifestos was the 25.05.2024. manifestos which are published after that date have not been part of the analysis.

Annex B: List of national and European parties included in analysis of manifestos

List of parties	
2019 – collected by GESIS	2024 – collected manually
Austria	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austrian People's Party • Freedom Party of Austria • NEOS The New Austria and Liberal Forum • Social Democratic Party of Austria • The Greens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austrian People's Party • Communist Party of Austria • Freedom Party of Austria • NEOS The New Austria and Liberal Forum • Social Democratic Party of Austria • The Greens
Belgium	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian Democrats & Flemish • Confederate Ecologists for the organisation of original struggles • Flemish Interest • Greens • New Flemish Alliance • Onward • Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats • Reformist Movement • Socialist Party • Workers' Party of Belgium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian Democratic & Flemish • Confederate Ecologists for the organisation of original struggles • Democratic Federalist Independent • Flemish Interest • Greens • New Flemish Alliance • Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats • Reformist Movement • Socialist Party • The Committed • Workers' Party of Belgium
Bulgaria	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulgarian Socialist Party • Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria • Democratic Bulgaria • Movement for Rights and Freedoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulgarian Socialist Party • Movement for Rights and Freedoms • There Is Such a People • We Continue the Change
Croatia	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridge of Independent Lists • Croatian Democratic Union • Social Democratic Party of Croatia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Miroslav Škoro's Homeland Movement • We Can! – Political Platform
Cyprus	



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Party • Democratic Rally • Progressive Party of Working People 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Party • Movement of Ecologists • Progressive Party of Working People
Czech Republic	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic Democratic Party • Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia • Czech Pirate Party • Czech Social Democratic Party • Freedom and Direct Democracy • Mayors and Independents • TOPog • Yes 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic Democratic Party • Czech Pirate Party • Freedom and Direct Democracy • Mayors and Independents • Tradition Responsibility Prosperity (TOP og) • YES 2011
Denmark	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservative People's Party • Danish People's Party • Danish Social Liberal Party • Liberal Alliance • Red-Green Alliance • Social Democrats • Venstre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservative People's Party • Denmark Democrats • Green Left • Liberal Alliance • Moderates • Red-Green Alliance • Social Democrats • Social Liberal Party • Venstre
Estonia	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre Party • Conservative People's Party of Estonia • Estonia 200 • Isamaa • Reform Party • Social Democratic Party 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre Party • Conservative People's Party of Estonia • Estonia 200 • Fatherland • Reform Party • Social Democratic Party
Finland	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre Party • Green League • Left Alliance • National Coalition Party • Social Democratic Party of Finland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre Party • Christian Democrats • Finns Party (formerly True Finns) • Green League • Left Alliance



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swedish People's Party of Finland • True Finns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Coalition Party • Social Democratic Party of Finland • Swedish People's Party of Finland
France	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • France Insoumise • Renaissance • The National Rally • The Ecologists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French Communist Party • France Unbowed • Reconquest • Renaissance • Socialist Party • The Ecologists • The National Rally • The Republicans
Germany	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alliance 90/Greens • Alternative for Germany • Free Democratic Party • Social Democratic Party of Germany • The Left • The Union parties (CDU/CSU) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alliance 90 Greens • Alternative for Germany • Free Democratic Party • Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance – Reason and Justice • Social Democratic Party of Germany • The Union parties
Greece	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance • Communist Party of Greece • New Democracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance • Communist Party of Greece • Democratic Patriotic Movement • New Democracy
Hungary	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Coalition • Fidesz Hungarian Civic Union Christian Democratic People's Party • Hungarian Socialist Party • Momentum Movement • Movement for a Better Hungary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Coalition • Hungarian Socialist Party • Momentum Movement • Talpra Magyarok (Party of Peter Magyar) • The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party
Ireland	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family of the Irish (Fine Gael) • Green Party 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Party • Social Democrats



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irish Labour Party • The Republican Party (Fianna Fáil) • We Ourselves (Sinn Fein) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soldiers of Destiny – The Republican Party
Italy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brothers of Italy • Democratic Party • Five Star Movement • Go Italy • Lega Salvini Premier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action • Brothers of Italy • Democratic Party • Five Star Movement • Go Italy • Greens and Left • Lega Salvini Premier
Latvia	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development/For! • National Alliance • New Unity • Social Democratic Party "Harmony" • Union of Greens and Farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Stability! • Latvia First • National Alliance • Social Democratic Party "Harmony" • The Progressives • Union of Greens and Farmers • United List • Unity
Lithuania	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral Action of Poles • Homeland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats • Labour Party • Liberal Movement of Lithuanian Republic • Lithuanian Peasant and Greens Union • Lithuanian Social Democratic Party • Order and Justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom Party • Homeland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats • Labour Party • Liberal Movement of Lithuanian Republic • Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union • Lithuanian Social Democratic Party • Union of Democrats "For Lithuania"
Luxembourg	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian Social People's Party • Democratic Party • Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party • The Greens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative Democratic Reform • Christian Social People's Party • Democratic Party • Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party • Pirate Party Luxembourg • The Greens • The Left



Malta	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Labour Party• Nationalist Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Democratic Alternative – Democratic Party• Labour Party
Netherlands	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Christian Democratic Appeal• Democrats 66• Forum for Democracy• GreenLeft• Labour Party• Party for Freedom• Party for the Animals• People's Party for Freedom and Democracy• Socialist Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Christian Democratic Appeal• Democrats 66• Farmer–Citizen Movement• GreenLeft–Labour• New Social Contract• Party for Freedom• People's Party for Freedom and Democracy• Socialist Party
Poland	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Law and Justice• Spring (Wiosna)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Left
Portugal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Left Bloc• People's Party• Portuguese Socialist Party• Social Democratic Party• Unitary Democratic Coalition_CDU	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chega• Democratic Alliance• Left Bloc• Liberal Initiative• Socialist Party
Romania	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alliance 2020 USR PLUS• National Liberal Party• People's Movement Party• PRO Romania• Social Democratic Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alliance for the Union of Romanians• Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania
Slovakia	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direction Social Democracy• Freedom and Solidarity• Progressive Slovakia• We are Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Christian Democratic Movement• Direction Social Democracy• Freedom and Solidarity• Movement for a Democratic Slovakia/For the People



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progressive Slovakia• Republic Movement
Slovenia	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• List of Marjan Šarec• New Slovenia• Slovenian Democratic Party• Social Democrats	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Slovenia – Christian Democrats• Slovenian Democratic Party• Social Democrats
Spain	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizens Party of the Citizens• People's Party• Podemos• Spanish Socialist Workers' Party• VOX	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spanish Socialist Workers' Party• Sumar• VOX
Sweden	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centre Party• Christian Democrats• Green Party• Left Party• Liberals• Moderate Party• Swedish Social Democratic Workers' Party• Sweden Democrats	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centre Party• Green Party• Left Party• Moderate Party• Swedish Social Democratic Workers' Party• Sweden Democrats

Table 2: List of national partes included in the analysis



List of European parties	
2019	2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe• Democracy in Europe Movement• European Christian Political Movement• European Conservatives and Reformists Party• European Free Alliance• European Green Party• European Left• European People's Party• European Pirate Party• PES• Volt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe• European Conservatives and Reformists Party• European Democratic Party• European Free Alliance• European Green Party• European Left• European People's Party• European Pirate Party• Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats• Volt

Table 3: List of European parties included in the analysis



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