

Legal Aspects of Space Exploration

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After a long hiatus, space exploration has returned in recent years to the top of the political agenda of a growing number of countries. Following the changing geopolitics of space activities, new actors are getting involved in space exploration for international prestige reasons. But there are also actors targeting the economic and commercial potential of space activities even in the field of exploration.

Space exploration has to be conducted in a reliable legal framework. Actors – public and private – need the assurance that their activities are accepted by the others on the basis of agreed principles and norms. This presentation introduces the present legal framework for space exploration. It deals with the relevant binding legal instruments (i.e. the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 and the Moon Treaty of 1979), the so-called soft law, which are guidelines and standards, and international policy statements.

In analyzing these documents and the main principles and norms applicable to space exploration are highlighted. It shows that there does not exist a coherent legal framework for space exploration yet, taking into account the interests of all types of actors (i.a. also the scientific community). On this background, the presentation identifies needs for further developments of regulations in this field.