

Statement of France

By Jean-Yves Le Gall,

President, CNES

Dear Ministers,

Dear colleagues and friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today, speaking as the French representative, and the topic of this Space Forum is particularly close to French hearts. The Mediterranean region is indeed a cornerstone of France's history and identity in at least three ways. At national level, the cultural, economic and ecological influence of the Mediterranean basin on France has been tremendous, starting with the first Greek settlements in my hometown Marseille. At European level, France has always been a bridge between the Mediterranean part of our continent and northern Europe. And at international level, France has always advocated closer cooperation between nations on both shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

For obvious societal, ecological and economic reasons, the Mediterranean region has to be considered a common good for all surrounding states. This is clearly one of the key challenges to be tackled in the Euro-Mediterranean relationship, and space is a vital tool to address the issues at stake. Indeed, space can foster progress, enhance protection and strengthen freedoms.

First, as a knowledge-driven and innovation-intensive sector, space is making a big contribution to individual and collective progress. Space can enhance our scientific knowledge, which is particularly valuable in the case of a complex ecosystem like the Mediterranean Sea. Space is also providing tangible services on Earth, in areas such as telecommunications or transportation. Here again, economic activities in the Mediterranean basin are strongly benefiting from space applications, be it through ship communications, vessel tracking for the management of shipping routes, port management or urban and natural coast management. The economic potential of space applications for the Mediterranean will be further improved in the future by new innovations using artificial intelligence for vessel tracking or the widespread uptake of GNSS applications for cargo management or port operations. More generally, space has the unique capability to merge data from different sources to create applications and products tailored to the needs of users in and around the Mediterranean Sea.

Second, space can protect by helping to meet the global challenges we are facing. Tackling climate change and its consequences is the first of these challenges. The vast majority of Essential Climate Variables or ECVs can only be measured from space. In addition, Earth-observation data are essential to mitigate the consequences of climate change, or during the recovery phase after natural disasters. The link with the Mediterranean Sea is obvious, as it is unfortunately one of the most endangered marine ecosystems on our planet.

Space can also be a tool for fostering international solidarity, as for example with the transnational issue of migrations, of which the Mediterranean has sadly become a patent illustration. Satellite applications can help to track vessels at sea, as well as their points of departure, thus accelerating the rescue process. More broadly, space can help to monitor shared resources like water, forests or endangered coastal areas. As such, space could contribute to nurturing a comprehensive approach towards the preservation of resources around the Mediterranean Sea. This could in turn have a defusing effect on tensions and

potential conflicts between Mediterranean stakeholders. All in all, space can be a powerful tool for Euro-Mediterranean solidarity, especially building on the European flagship Galileo and Copernicus programmes.

Finally, space can also contribute to protecting freedoms, which is one of Europe's core values. By facilitating access to data and information through Earth-observation and telecommunications applications, space promotes transparency and openness. At the same time, space plays a role in strengthening European sovereignty, which is the essential condition to preserve freedoms in and around our continent. Space applications will also lay the foundation for an inclusive security and defence community for Europe and its partners in the Mediterranean area. Indeed, several important European cooperation programmes in this area involve Mediterranean nations, such as Athena-Fidus for telecommunications or Helios for Earth observation.

In conclusion, no overall Euro-Mediterranean strategy can be built without space. Thanks to its state-of-the-art capabilities, both at national and European level, our continent can provide space applications for virtually all the challenges facing the Mediterranean. Here again, space can bring tangible benefits to make our planet a better place.