



National and Kapodistrian University of Athens  
School of Law  
Department of International Studies



Athens Public International Law Center (Athens PIL)

## **2026 Athens International Young Scholars Conference on Space Law**

### **Weaponising the Final Frontier: Outer Space Militarisation and the Legal Boundaries of *Jus ad Bellum* and *Jus in Bello***

11-12 September 2026

Venue: Athens, Greece

Law School of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

### **Call for papers**

In an era marked by accelerated technological advancement, as well as geopolitical contestation, outer space is undergoing a profound transformation. Global reliance on space-based technologies has increased considerably, with satellite systems now underpinning essential services ranging from navigation and telecommunications to financial transactions, disaster response, and critical infrastructure. At the same time, threats to space assets have proliferated, whether arising from counter-space capabilities, the cyber domain or the growing accumulation of space debris.

These challenges are further compounded by the increasing number and diversity of actors involved in space activities, including both States and commercial operators, as well as by the rapid integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, quantum communication, and cyber-secure architectures into space systems. In parallel, the distinction between civilian and strategic uses of space

services is becoming progressively blurred, giving rise to complex legal and governance questions.

In this evolving environment, outer space is no longer merely a domain of exploration and cooperation, but also a critical enabler of national security. This solidifies its strategic value as a contested military domain, increasingly characterised by strategic competition, operational interdependence and heightened risks. Threats against space systems now span a broad spectrum, including the potential placement of weapons in outer space, the development and use of kinetic and non-kinetic counter-space capabilities, as well as activities, like non-consensual rendezvous and proximity operations (RPOs). Even more so, space-based infrastructure plays a pivotal role in contemporary uses of force, enabling (and/or supporting) terrestrial military operations through satellite communications, intelligence and navigation and positioning. These developments are further complicated by ambiguities surrounding dual-use technologies, evolving doctrines and policies, and a lack of transparency in terminology and strategic intent. Such dynamics raise fundamental concerns not only regarding the safety and security of space activities, but also regarding the long-term sustainability of the space environment and the risk of escalation or even an arms race in outer space.

When observed through the prism of contemporary international relations, which are distinguished by an escalating use of force and a proliferation of international crises, it becomes evident that military considerations in outer space have now attained paramount importance for the preservation of international peace and security. This imperative remains the cornerstone of the organisation of the United Nations, and, more broadly, of the UN system, and an ever-present imperative in contemporary state relations.

Against this backdrop, the applicability -or interpretation- of principles governing the use of force, require to be revisited in the context of outer space. On the one hand, the prohibition of use of force and the right to self-defence shall be examined in light of the specificities of space activities, such as attacks on dual-use satellites, indirect harm, and the cascading effect of space debris. On the other hand, the extent to which international humanitarian law could regulate hostilities (also) in outer space, through the consideration of fundamental principles, such as proportionality, precaution or necessity, remains contested.

Given this background, the role of multilateral institutions and international cooperation becomes increasingly central. The diversity and complexity of the aforementioned challenges, coupled with the ever-growing importance of outer space for humankind, underscore the need for constructive dialogue among all stakeholders, in order to ensure that outer space remains peaceful, secure and accessible for all. In particular, both legally binding and non-binding instruments (ranging from treaty law to guidelines and confidence-building measures) may operate in a complementary manner as building blocks towards strengthening governance and advancing objectives, notably in an era where law-making seems stagnant, whereas the prevention of an arms race in outer space remains an overarching goal.

At the same time, the geographical and operational scope of these challenges is expanding. Space security concerns are no longer confined to near-Earth orbit, as increasing attention is being directed towards cislunar space, lunar exploration, and resource utilisation activities. The prospect of sustained human and robotic presence beyond Earth orbit raises new legal questions regarding the applicability of existing rules, including those governing the use of celestial bodies.

In this context, the 2026 edition of the Athens International Young Scholars Conference on Space Law focuses on the legal dimensions of space safety, security, and stability. The Conference aims to explore how international space law responds to emerging risks and evolving geopolitical dynamics, and whether the existing legal framework, particularly the principles enshrined in the Outer Space Treaty, remains adequate in light of these developments.

The Conference invites students (from undergraduate to graduate and doctoral level) to critically examine these issues. Contributions may address questions *de lege lata*, through the interpretation of existing treaty and customary norms, and/or *de lege ferenda*, by proposing new regulatory approaches aimed at enhancing the safety, security, and sustainability of outer space activities.

### **Indicative Topics**

Submitted papers are expected to explore relevant directions, such as:

- Legal implications of dual-use space technologies and the evolving concept of “peaceful purposes”;
- Threats to space systems, including kinetic and non-kinetic counterspace capabilities;
- The qualification of hostile acts in outer space under *ius ad bellum*;
- Cybersecurity challenges in space systems and legal responses to cyber interference;
- Attribution and responsibility for harmful interference with space objects;
- The role of transparency, confidence-building measures, and soft law in space governance;
- The interplay between legally binding and non-binding instruments in advancing space security;
- Prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS): legal and policy perspectives;
- The role of commercial actors in relation to military considerations regarding outer space and the concept of “responsible behaviour”;
- Legal implications of neutrality violations in the context of outer space activities;
- The applicability of countermeasures in outer space conflicts;
- International responsibility and liability for breaches of international humanitarian law obligations during conflicts in outer space;
- Legal issues relating to military activities that affect cislunar space, lunar operations, and space resource exploration and utilisation;
- The interaction between space law and other legal regimes, including international humanitarian law and cybersecurity law in the context of military uses of (and in) outer space;
- The role of narrative, perception, and strategic signalling in shaping space security discourse;

- The role of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and other multilateral *fora* in space security governance;
- The role of the United Nations and collective security mechanisms in space conflicts;
- The right to self-defence in response to space-enabled attacks;
- The protection of the outer space environment in the context of conflicts in outer space;
- Norm development and legal/governance gaps in regulating armed conflict in outer space.

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### **Submission Guidelines**

Prospective speakers may submit an abstract of the proposed paper not exceeding 250 words by e-mail to: [yscsl2026.athens@gmail.com](mailto:yscsl2026.athens@gmail.com) , by 30 June 2026, 23:59 EEST.

The abstract must indicate:

- (i) the title of the paper,
- (ii) the full name of the author(s) and the name of the corresponding author in case of more than one author,
- (iii) full contact details of the author(s), including academic affiliation and a valid email address,
- (iv) student status (undergraduate – postgraduate – doctoral candidate), and
- (v) institutional affiliation (a proof for (iv) and (v) is required).
- (vi) a list of up to five (5) bibliographical sources.

The language of the Conference will be English.

Each submitted abstract will be evaluated based on its technical quality, innovative contribution, and relevance to the theme of the Conference.

There is no registration fee.

Selected papers will be considered for publication in the Conference proceedings.

Full papers should be approximately 5,000 words, excluding footnotes. Further guidance will be provided following the selection process.

### **Deadlines**

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| 30 June 2026         | Deadline for abstract submission                     |
| 20 July 2026         | Notification to authors                              |
| 31 August 2026       | Deadline for paper submission (No paper – no podium) |
| 8 September 2026     | Deadline for presentation submission                 |
| 11-12 September 2026 | Young Scholars Conference                            |

Athens, 4 May 2025

### **The scientific coordinators**

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