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## **FROM REGIONAL INNOVATION HUB TO SPACE-READY ECOSYSTEM: BUILDING VIRTUAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE FUTURE OF SPACE RESEARCH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In an era where the boundaries between industries are rapidly dissolving, space technologies are no longer reserved just for space agencies but are becoming an integral part of broader innovation ecosystems. Science and Technology Park Niš is actively positioning itself within this transformation by developing Virtual Centers of Excellence that bridge advanced research, industry application, and entrepreneurial growth. Through strategic investment in infrastructure, talent development and collaboration with academia and high-tech companies, STP Niš is fostering capabilities in fields such as artificial intelligence, advanced materials, embedded systems, and data analytics—domains that are increasingly relevant for space-related applications. These Virtual Centers of Excellence are designed not only as research units but as dynamic platforms where innovation is translated into scalable, market-ready solutions. By integrating into international innovation networks and aligning with emerging trends in the global space economy, STP Niš aims to create a foundation for future participation in space research and technology development. This keynote by Milan Randelović explores how a regional innovation ecosystem can evolve into a space-capable environment—demonstrating that the path to space begins with strong local foundations, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a long-term strategic vision.