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ESA'S RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SPACE EXPLORATION

Abstract

The European Space Agency and its Member States have built for Europe a long-standing tradition of space exploration providing significant contributions to human and robotic exploration. Recent efforts at political-level have also been initiated to engage decision-makers on defining the future of Europe's activities in space exploration.

Following the 2012 ESA Council at Ministerial level held in Naples (Italy), ESA's space exploration plan focuses on several cornerstones missions and activities targeting LEO (participation to the ISS and experimentation), Moon (technology studies) and Mars (ExoMars and technology preparation for future missions).

On the political-side at the informal meeting of Space Council ministers under French Presidency of the European Union in July 2008, Ministers in charge of space affairs from EU and ESA Member States supported the proposal of the European Commission (EC) to organise, in cooperation with ESA, a high-level conference providing a first long-term global vision for space exploration. It has been followed by three dedicated international high-level conferences at Ministerial level held in Prague in 2009, Brussels in 2010 and Lucca in 2011. This later event led to the adoption of the Lucca Declaration and the first high-level space policy dialogue meeting organised by Europe. The next one will be hosted by the United States in January 2014. ESA, the EC and their Member States are elaborating the European position for this dialogue meeting.

This paper presents the process and results of the various activities initiated in recent years and outlines the planned activities of the agency.