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TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENTS ON A EUROPEAN STRATEGY ON SPACE EXPLORATION

Abstract

Europe (defined as the European Space Agency and its Member States) has a long-standing tradition of space exploration, and has participated with outstanding success in many activities on its own and in partnership with other space-faring countries. It has made significant contributions to human and robotic exploration. However, compared to previously the political dimension of space exploration is today in the process of being fully acknowledged in Europe, as is the case in many other countries around the world.

The informal Space Council held in Kourou in 2008 served as starting point of a political debate on the issue of space exploration. It has been followed by two dedicated international high level conferences at ministerial level. On 23 October 2009, European Ministers in charge of space met in Prague to reflect collectively on the way forward of Europe's involvement in exploration during the first "High-Level Conference on Human Space Exploration". The second high-level conference on exploration took place in Brussels 21 October 2010. The event was co-organised by the Belgian Presidency of the EU, the EC, the Chair of the ESA Council at ministerial level (Italy) and by ESA DG. Like in Prague, the Ministers of ESA and EU Member States in charge of space took part to this event, as well as Director Generals and other senior officials from the European Commission and ESA and representatives from international partners. This conference was an important milestone towards continuing to define a European vision and elaborating a strategic plan for space exploration in the frame of an international partnership. The conclusions derived from the Conference have been reflected in the 7th Space Council Resolution adopted on 25 November 2010.

To accompany this effort ESA has developed a systematic process to coordinate strategic exploration activities at ESA corporate level and with various European political, scientific and technical stakeholders. This paper will thus present the process set-up and the results of the various activities initiated in 2010 leading to the second high-level conference on exploration. The planned activities leading to third space exploration to be held in Lucca (Italy) in November 2011 will also be outlined.