



Lucerne ministerial conference Success of spacefaring Europe assured!

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The ministerial conference of the European Space Agency (ESA) was held in Lucerne, Switzerland, on Thursday 1 and Friday 2 December. France, represented by Thierry Mandon, Secretary of State for Higher Education and Research, convinced the other member states to sign up to the ambitious programme proposed by ESA in order to maintain Europe's leading role in space exploration.

In recent years, ministerial council meetings have been held with increasing frequency in response to the new challenges facing the space sector in these rapidly changing times. The latest meeting in Lucerne comes after those in Naples in 2012 and Luxembourg in 2014. France worked to achieve the broadest possible consensus on the key priorities for spacefaring Europe, while enabling its industry to stay competitive in the international arena.

First, with access to space: the go-ahead for development of Ariane 6 had already been confirmed on 3 November ahead of the Lucerne council meeting. As for support for European launcher operations, member states reaffirmed that the Guiana Space Centre (CSG) will continue to serve as Europe's spaceport and agreed to cover its fixed costs. Preparation for the future beyond Ariane 6 and Vega C will be assured with the development of the Prometheus low-cost oxygen-methane engine.

Second, the ExoMars programme will be pursued with additional funding for ExoMars 2020, while ESA's mandatory science programme, which has produced Europe's greatest accomplishments in advancing world science (Herschel-Planck, Rosetta-Philae, etc.), will be funded as requested. With ExoMars 2020, Europe is set to land a rover on Mars carrying first-of-a-kind science experiments with the aim of detecting traces of life.

Europe's participation in operating the International Space Station has also been extended through to 2024. This decision shows Europe's attachment as partners of the United States, Russia, Japan and Canada to international human exploration of the solar system, with French astronaut Thomas Pesquet currently on a six-month mission to the station.

Lastly, innovation, development of applications and the competitiveness of the space industry also received significant funding to prepare for the future, notably for space telecommunications through the ARTES budget lines and Earth observation through the EOEP envelope programme, as well as for climate-monitoring satellites, new generations of Sentinel satellites for the Copernicus programme, cutting-edge technologies, new applications and new uses of space.

After the conference, Thierry Mandon, Secretary of State for Higher Education and Research, commented: *"Through its involvement in all of these programmes and its ability to federate European efforts, France has confirmed its role as ESA's leading contributor and helped maintain a world-class space programme for Europe. I would especially like to thank CNES for its decisive role in the positive outcomes of this conference. Thanks to the efforts of everyone involved, the success of spacefaring Europe is assured!"*