

N° 16–2022: Redirecting ESA programmes in response to geopolitical crisis

13 April 2022

Following the Russian aggression against Ukraine, ESA's Director General has initiated a comprehensive review of all activities currently undertaken in cooperation with Russia and Ukraine. The objective is to determine the possible consequences of this new geopolitical context for ESA programmes and activities and to create a more resilient and robust space infrastructure for Europe.

The ESA Council on 13 April acknowledged the following findings and took the following decisions.

ESA will discontinue cooperative activities with Russia on Luna-25, -26 and -27. As with ExoMars, the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the resulting sanctions put in place represent a fundamental change of circumstances and make it impossible for ESA to implement the planned lunar cooperation. However, ESA's science and technology for these missions remains of vital importance. A second flight opportunity has already been secured on board a NASA-led Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) mission for the PROSPECT lunar drill and volatile analysis package (originally planned for Luna-27). An alternative flight opportunity to test the ESA navigation camera known as PILOT-D (originally planned for Luna-25) is already being procured from a commercial service provider.

Meanwhile, a way forward for the PILOT precision landing and hazard avoidance technology is already being defined. This capability is needed for European Lunar exploration activities such as the European Large Logistic Lander (EL3), proposed for decision at CM22. Further, the ESA Director General and the President of the Japanese agency JAXA last week signed an agreement to fly ESA's EMS-L, the Exospheric Mass Spectrometer instrument, on board the JAXA/ISRO LUPEX lunar rover mission. This adds to the growing list of European experiments flying to the Moon in the next few years.

Although all the elements of the ExoMars Rover mission (the launcher, carrier module, descent module and Rosalind Franklin rover) have now passed their flight readiness reviews, because cooperation with Roscosmos on ExoMars has been suspended, the mission will not be launched in September this year. Instead, a fast-track study is now under way led by Thales Alenia Space of Italy to assess options for the way forward.