

ESA Statement at the 61st STSC session

Agenda item 4. 'General Exchange of Views'

5 February 2024



Madam Chair,

Distinguished Delegates,

First of all, let me commend you, Madam Chair, on your excellent work in leading this Subcommittee. The European Space Agency also congratulates Ms Aarti Holla-Maini on her appointment as Director of the Office of Outer Space Affairs. Under her very able guidance and leadership, ESA will be happy to support and contribute to the work of COPUOS and its Subcommittees to help achieve progress on space issues of global importance.

Let me also express my appreciation and thanks to the Office team for the professional preparation of the STSC, as well as its support and guidance. As a permanent observer, the European Space Agency remains committed to make a positive contribution to this session of the Subcommittee.

ESA has witnessed several exciting space-related milestones in the past few months.

2023 was the year India reached the Moon with the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 near the lunar south pole, making India the fourth country to land on our natural satellite. Congratulations to our Indian partners for this incredible achievement.

ESA also congratulates JAXA on the recent successful landing of its Smart Lander for Investigating the Moon on the lunar surface, which allowed Japan to join the illustrious circle of Moon explorers.

Similarly, NASA's successful retrieval of samples from asteroid Bennu with the OSIRIS-REx mission was another remarkable space event that stirred great excitement among the international space community.

ESA itself achieved several major milestones in 2023. Let me highlight, in all brevity, the following to illustrate the range and impact of ESA's activities:

The first of six Meteosat Third Generation weather satellites, developed for EUMETSAT, was successfully placed into orbit on an Ariane 5. From its geostationary orbit above the equator, it will observe Earth's atmosphere in improved detail. Its novel Lightning Imager will monitor lightning events, even in daylight, allowing severe storms to be detected early and warnings issued.

On 14 April, ESA's latest bold science mission to the outer Solar System, Juice (JUperiter ICy moons Explorer), embarked on its eight-year journey to Jupiter. Juice will study in detail the gas giant's three large ocean-bearing moons: Ganymede, Callisto and Europa. The ten science instruments on board were developed by institutions from all over Europe, together with contributions from the US, Japanese and Israeli space agencies. We expect Juice to arrive at Jupiter in July 2031.

On 30 April, Aeolus, the first mission to observe Earth's wind profiles on a global scale, concluded its nominal operations. The mission overshot its expected three-year lifespan by over 18 months. As an inspiring example of responsible behaviour in orbit, ESA's spacecraft operators guided Aeolus in a first-of-its-kind assisted re-entry, leading to the spacecraft's demise over Antarctica on 28 July.

In mid-June, ESA formally handed over the second European Service Module to NASA. Integrated with the Orion crew capsule, it is set for lift-off to the Moon in 2025. During the Artemis II mission, the ESM-2 will have a crucial role, providing water and air to the four astronauts, in addition to supplying electricity, propulsion and temperature control for the spacecraft.

On 1 July 2023, ESA's latest astrophysics mission, Euclid, lifted off and started its month-long journey to Sun-Earth Lagrange point L2. Euclid is a new tool for delving into the cosmic mysteries of dark energy and dark matter. By observing billions of galaxies out to 10 billion light-years, it will create the most extensive 3D map of the Universe, with the third dimension representing time. Euclid's first images of the Perseus Cluster are simply breathtaking. Just like the James Webb space telescope, its data is helping to revolutionise astrophysics.

On 6 July 2023, Europe's Ariane 5 rocket completed its final flight, placing two communications satellites into their planned geostationary transfer orbits. The mission marked the 117th flight for Ariane 5, a series that began in 1996 and carried numerous commercial and European institutional missions into space.

On 27 August 2023, the SpaceX Crew Dragon Endurance docked with the International Space Station, marking the official beginning of the Huginn mission. ESA astronaut Andreas Mogensen played a pivotal role as the pilot of Crew-7. At the end of September, Andreas became commander of the International Space Station.

At the ESA Space Summit held in Seville, Spain, on 6 November, government ministers representing ESA's Member States, Associate States and Cooperating States resolved to strengthen Europe's space ambitions to better serve European citizens. Ministers agreed to harness space for a greener future, took decisive steps in exploration and safeguarded Europe's autonomous access to space while preparing a paradigm shift towards a more competitive next generation of launchers.

2024 bodes to be an equally exciting year for ESA. In January, ESA project astronaut Marcus Wandt embarked on his first mission to the International Space Station. In April, ESA will oversee, for the European Commission, the launch of two Galileo navigation satellites, with another two following later in the year.

In June and July, ESA's planetary defence mission Hera and its Earth observation satellite EarthCARE – a joint mission with the Japanese space agency JAXA – will be launched.

Similarly, we will witness the launches of Sentinel 1C and 2C this year, contributing to the growth of the world-class Copernicus constellation.

The chief highlight of 2024 will be Europe's regained autonomous access to space through the highly anticipated inaugural flight of Ariane 6 in late summer and the return to flight of Vega-C.

Finally, ESA strongly supports the proposal by SMPAG and IWAN to announce 2029 as the International Year of Planetary Defence, as presented in CRP 20. We encourage COPUOS Member States to join this initiative as the close approach of asteroid Apophis provides a unique opportunity to inform the worldwide public about the potential threat of NEOs and how this threat can be addressed by space technologies.

Distinguished delegates, let me conclude by emphasising ESA's commitment to remain an active, dutiful member of the international space community, exploring and using outer space, working towards capacity and partnership building, strengthening the rule of law in outer space and, last but not least, making a meaningful contribution as a permanent observer to the important work of this Committee.

Madam Chair, delegates, thank you very much for your kind attention.