

Project Mars: ESA's role in space exploration

Voice-over 1:

A colony on the moon would serve as a staging post before the major challenge of trying to send robotic and then human missions to Mars in the 2030s. While NASA will probably dominate proceedings, the European Space Agency will want to be on an equal footing. One of those watching the speech by the NASA representative closely was Umberto Guidoni, a former astronaut.

Voice-over 2:

I think that these days, given the growing interest in space exploration, ESA has to set a new strategy on the issue. This strategy is already being set out to an extent with the Aurora project that plans a primary phase of robotic missions to the moon, then to Mars to prepare the way for human missions.

Voice-over 1:

The Aurora project has been underway since 2001 – asserting Europe's interest in further exploration of our solar system while retaining a large degree of independence from potential partners in Russia, the US, China and elsewhere.

Voice-over 2:

I can imagine how important this is going to be for Europe, in terms of reaching the people, touching their hearts and creating a kind of European identity we don't really have today. We need a large scale project that can go straight to the Europeans' hearts, rather than their wallets or their sense of reason. I think that for a European, seeing a European astronaut setting foot on Mars would really unite Europe behind this dream.

Voice-over 1:

The politicians and scientists have their dreams - and the taxpayer has to foot the bill. At the end of the day the public needs to know that the project is worthwhile, that the world of science will benefit.

John Zarnecki:

There are so many questions that we can address by going to the Moon and Mars. I think we must go to them both; it's not one or the other.

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