

ESA Demonstrates Long-Term Commitment to Human Spaceflight



ESA announced on May 20th 2009 the new class of the European astronaut corps. The astronauts were selected in an rigorous European-wide process starting with 8413 applicants.

At the ESA press conference introducing the new astronauts at ESTEC/Noordwijk Simonetta Di Pippo, ESA Director of Human Spaceflight said: “With the ISS lifetime being considered for an extension to 2020 and beyond, I believe today’s selection of six new astronauts shows where Europe stands.”

Europe's new astronauts were presented at a press conference at ESTEC with Simonetta Di Pippo in the middle of the astronauts (courtesy of ESA)

The new astronauts are (from the left):

1. Luca Parmitano, Italian
2. Timothy Peake, British
3. Thomas Pesquet, French
4. Andreas Mogensen, Danish
5. Samantha Cristoforetti, Italian
6. Alexander Gerst, German

The new class will resume training immediately at the ESA Astronaut Training Division at Cologne, Germany. The ESA Astronaut Training Division is an integral part of the international team of the European Astronaut Center (EAC). This team consists of employees of the European Space Agency (ESA) and the Italian, French and German national space agencies (ASI, CNES and DLR), who work together on tasks in the field of European manned space flight. DLR contributes 20 specialists to the Astronaut Training Division and three physicians to the Operational Medicine Division. In addition DLR provides the infrastructure of the Crew Training Center including a training hall, a diving pool as well as offices and control rooms. The European Astronaut Center serves as:

- Home base of the European astronauts
- Astronaut Training Facility
- Medical Support for the European astronauts

The selection of the new class of astronauts signifies ESA’s long term commitment to human spaceflight. The basic training will begin immediately not only at ESA but also at international partner’s facilities. It is not known yet whether one or more astronauts be participating in the Russian and/or NASA Mars training programs.

The “Class of 2009” shows two peculiarities: Italy provides two astronauts because of its separate MOU with NASA and Britain contributes one astronaut. The British government so far has abstained from human spaceflight activities for cost reasons. The new astronaut might signal a rekindling of interest.

As the ESA Director General pointed out during the press conference, ESA has 4 flight opportunities to the ISS based on its 8.3 % partner’s share and Italy has one flight every 5 years as agreed in a separate MOU for the delivery and operations of the MPLM (Multipurpose Logistics Module). Whether ESA might buy additional “seats” on Soyuz taxi flights is not known yet.

The selection of a female astronaut so far still is an exception to the all-male ESA team since Heike Walpot and Renate Bruemmer left the astronaut corps after the Spacelab D2 mission however it is a good sign for the next round of European astronaut selection.

With the surprisingly high number of initial candidates it can be assumed that there were also astronaut applicants from the states which joined ESA just recently like the Czech Republic, Greece or Luxembourg.

Altogether there will be seven “guaranteed” ESA flights to the ISS up to 2020 which will have to be shared among the current ESA astronaut corps and the rookies– altogether 14 members. However, Michael Tognini, head of EAC and veteran astronaut remarked at the press conference that the new astronauts are in a better position than his class: “When I flew we had nothing”.

All that demonstrates that Europe is determined to continue human space exploration at an increased level looking optimistic into the future.

**For more information please refer to official ESA [site](#)
Joachim J. Kehr, Editor SpaceOps News (July 2009)**