

# Happy US-Russian crew deny 'divorce in space'

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US astronaut Michael Fincke attends a press conference outside Moscow in Star City. A Russian and US space crew denied on Friday that new rules forbid them from sharing toilets and food in orbit, hailing their work as the "best partnership" in human history.

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"We are still working our partnership together, but please don't make a mistake," US astronaut Michael Fincke said at the crew's first news conference since returning from the [International Space Station](#) (ISS).

"This is the best partnership that humans have ever had ... We're going to the stars together," he said in comments aired on Russian state television.

"We share things... The Americans definitely never said the Russians cannot use their toilet," added Fincke, gracefully switching between English and Russian.

An interview by veteran [cosmonaut](#) Gennady Padalka, published after the Russian returned to the ISS last month, laid bare extraordinary tensions in the US-Russian space partnership.

Padalka told the Novaya Gazeta newspaper that new no-sharing rules instituted on the station were damaging moral and causing friction among the crew.

"I wish that professional politicians and bureaucrats on Earth would not meddle and impede our work," he was quoted as saying.

Padalka also said the two sides had their own toilets and the Americans had been told not to allow the Russians to use their exercise machine on the ISS. The Novaya Gazeta called it "a divorce in space".

But Russian [flight engineer](#) Yuri Lonchakov was also swift to deny Friday that each team kept to their separate corners of the space station, saying the crew on board had a "cosmic partnership."

"By no means can you now divide the United States and the Europeans, and say that everyone will work separately. Only with all our forces and all our success can the [space station](#) work," he told journalists.

US software millionaire and [space tourist](#) Charles Simonyi -- the first person to travel into space twice as a tourist -- also travelled back in the [Russian Soyuz capsule](#) with Lonchakov and Fincke on Wednesday.

The Russian space agency Roskosmos said Simonyi, who paid 35 million dollars for his 10-day tour, could be their last space tourist as spots on the cramped Soyuz capsule will be filled shuttling professional astronauts.

Not only will the ISS full-time crew jump from three to six next month, but US astronauts will be forced to rely on the Russian space agency for a ride to the station after US space agency NASA retires its shuttle in 2010.

But 10 years after the first piece of the ISS was sent up, Simonyi said the ISS was ready to house six permanent crew members in orbit.

"It's a very big station. I'm not a specialist, but in my opinion it's ready for six people to live in," Simonyi said.

In addition to extra beds, solar batteries and exercise equipment, a new toilet will double as a water purification system.

"With water we can do everything!" Fincke said of the equipment that allows astronauts to recycle urine into drinkable water.

Meanwhile, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev pledged that despite the financial crisis Russia will not cut funds to its space programme.

"We will in any case earmark funds for the space sector," Medvedev told journalists at a award ceremony for two Russian cosmonauts.

"If we now -- even temporarily -- slow development, we will fall 10 years behind... I hope that our cosmonauts will always be at the forefront of the world," the Russian president said.

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