

ESA image: Team spirit

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Credit: ESA

Spaceflight is all about teamwork. From the five space agencies that build and maintain the International Space Station to the mission control centres on Earth and the European, Japanese, American and Russian astronauts who fly to the space laboratory, international cooperation and knowhow is critical for a successful mission.

Here, ESA astronauts Alexander Gerst and Samantha Cristoforetti pose with their suited Russian colleagues Anton Shkaplerov and Maksim

Surayev.

All four will leave Earth for the International Space Station this year. Alexander and Maxim are first up, on 28 May, while Samantha and Anton have their departure planned for 24 November. They will stay on the orbital outpost for around six months.

The ESA astronauts will support their Russian colleagues as 'third operators' if the cosmonauts venture outside the Space Station in their Orlan spacesuits. Here they are preparing to train with the airlocks that separate astronauts in the Space Station from the harsh vacuum of outer space. Third operators help the spacewalkers put on and remove their spacesuits.

Alexander and Samantha are obvious choices to help the cosmonauts because they have both trained with the Orlan suit themselves. All Station [astronauts](#) must speak Russian and English.

Alexander's Expedition 41 mission patch is visible below the European Astronaut Corps patch on his flight suit.

Provided by European Space Agency

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