

# Russian, German and US astronauts dock with ISS

May 29 2014

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Russia's Soyuz TMA-13M spacecraft carrying a crew of Russian, German and US astronauts blasts off from the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan early on May 29, 2014

A crew of Russian, German and US astronauts docked with the International Space Station Thursday as space cooperation between Moscow and the West continues despite their worst standoff since the Cold War.

"At 5:44 am Moscow time (01:44 GMT), the manned Soyuz TMA-13M spacecraft docked successfully with the ISS," the Russian [space](#) agency Roskosmos said in a statement.

Russian cosmonaut Maxim Surayev, his NASA colleague Reid Wiseman and German Alexander Gerst from the European Space Agency opened the hatch into the ISS just over two hours later, Russian mission control said on its website.

Grinning broadly, they hugged the crew of three already on board the international space laboratory, US astronaut Steve Swanson and Russians Alexander Skvortsov and Oleg Artemyev.

The Soyuz craft had blasted off from Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on schedule shortly before midnight Moscow time.

The astronauts took a six-hour fast-track route to the ISS after the previous crew to travel to the ISS in March was forced to spend two days in orbit due to a technical glitch.

The new ISS crewmembers are due to carry out a mission lasting 167 days and return to Earth in November.

Surayev, 42, is on his second lengthy ISS mission after his maiden voyage in 2009, when he became the first Russian space blogger. Wiseman and Gerst, who are both 38, are on their first space mission.

During a press conference on Wednesday, the crew was asked whether the current tensions between Russia and the West over Ukraine would affect their relationship. They responded by hugging each other.

Since the retirement of the US space shuttle in 2011, NASA is for now wholly reliant on Russia for delivering astronauts to the space station on

its tried-and-trusted Soyuz launch and capsule system.



European Space Agency's German astronaut Alexander Gerst (C), Russian cosmonaut Maxim Suraev (bottom) and US NASA astronaut Gregory Wiseman (top) board the Soyuz TMA-13M at the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on May 28, 2014

The recent chill in East-West relations set off by the crisis in Ukraine has prompted Russia to warn that it may prohibit the United States from using one of its newest rockets in the launch of American military satellites.

Moscow has also hinted that it may turn down Washington's request to extend the lifespan of the ISS by four years through 2024.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who oversees the space sector, said this month that Russia will only need the ISS until 2020, saying that Russia wanted to use its resources on "more promising projects."

NASA for its part cut ties with Russia last month, except for cooperation aboard the ISS due to Moscow's role in Ukraine.

"Given Russia's ongoing violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, NASA is suspending the majority of its ongoing engagements with the Russian Federation," NASA said in a statement.

Rogozin responded by derisively suggesting that NASA might have to use a "trampoline" to send its astronauts to the ISS.

In all 16 countries are participants in the ISS programme, though the US and Russia do the lion's share of financing the project.

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