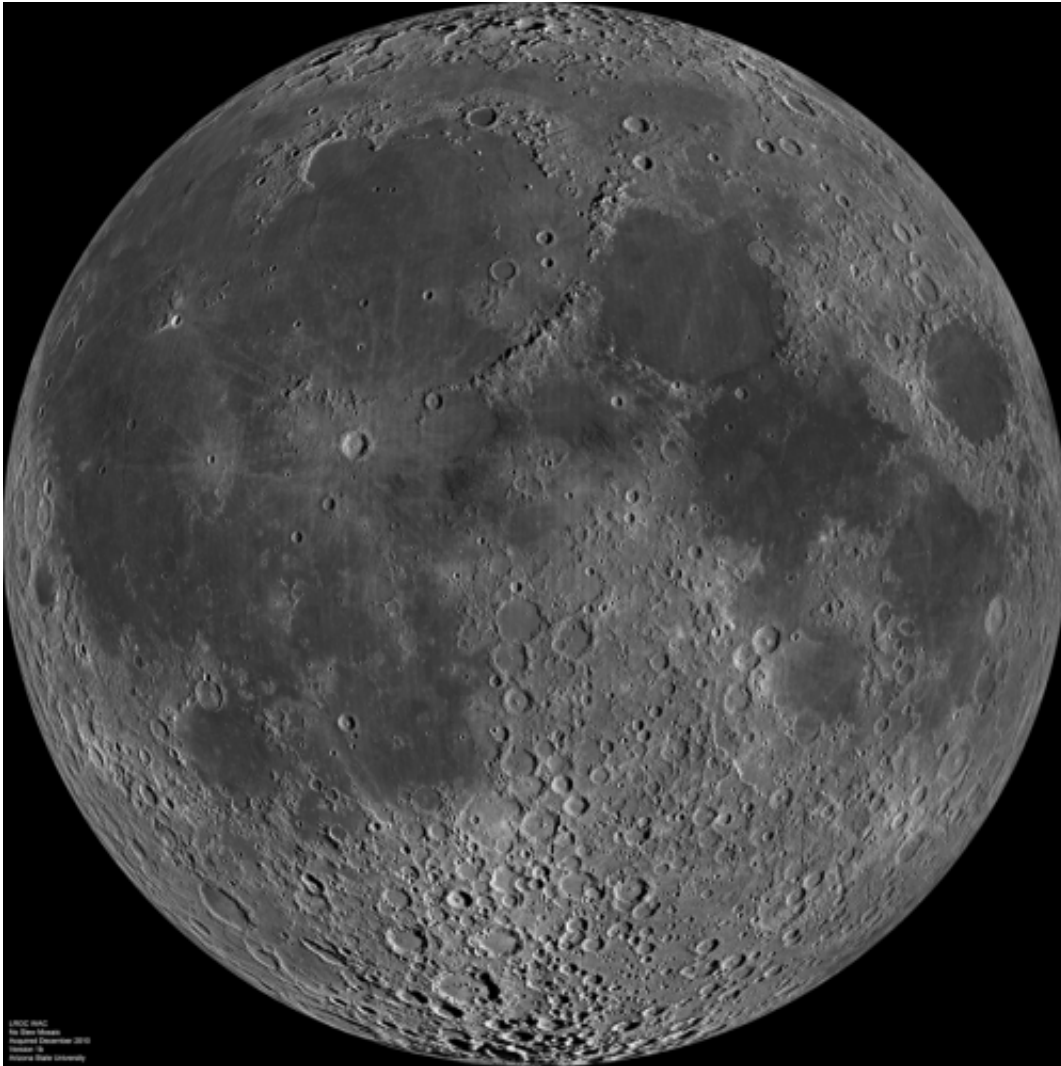


European space boss has Moon Village plan

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This is a composite image of the lunar nearside taken by the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter in June 2009, note the presence of dark areas of maria on this side of the moon. Credit: NASA

The European Space Agency's new boss elaborated Friday on his vision for a multinational research village on the Moon—a leading contender for a project to succeed the International Space Station.

For now, it is just an idea—called "crazy" by some—but one that Jan Woerner said was being widely discussed as the end of the ISS looms large.

The broad concept is a base for [lunar exploration](#) by humans and robots, potentially a stopover for spacecraft and possibly even a mining site.

"It's not to build some small houses over there and then to have a city hall and a church and whatever," said Woerner, who took over as ESA director general last July.

The Moon Village would have "multiple uses and multiple users", he told journalists in Paris.

"Maybe one country is more interested in science, another may be a private company interested in mining... and another may be interested to use the Moon as a stepping stone for further exploration," he explained.

"This is the overall scheme, and we are now discussing of course worldwide whether there is enough interest in that to go ahead with it," said Woerner.

The timing, he added, would be "post-ISS".

The orbiting science station is a joint project of Europe, Canada, the United States, Japan and Russia.

All members but the European Union have agreed to operate and finance the ISS to at least 2024.

Liking 'crazy'

Woerner insisted Friday the ISS "has its value" and said he hoped to convince member states that "ESA should continue" its involvement in the project.

Europe is currently committed until 2020.

As for the future, "I see the Moon Village as the ideal successor of the International Space Station for... exploration," said Woerner.

"So far, there is no competitive proposal on the table."

Unlike the ISS, he explained, a lunar village required no "formal decision" among countries.

"It is more an understanding of many nations to go together to the Moon."

What is important, however, is a discussion on the best location to settle. "Is it the far side? Is it the near side? Is it the poles?"

Once a spot is chosen, said Woerner, individual countries or [space](#) agencies will decide how they want to take part in the project.

Who would take part?

"Russia has some lunar missions planned, so why not have them as part of the Moon Village?" asked Woerner, noting also that "the Chinese are planning some lunar missions."

He also said he did not mind that some think his idea hare-brained.

"The word 'crazy' is exactly something I would like," he said. "We have to think out of the box. That means new ideas."

Woerner said he had mooted his idea at two space gatherings last year, in the United States and in Israel, and "I've had several organisations worldwide saying to me: 'How can we participate?'."

The scheme will come up in talks with the space agencies of the US, Japan, Canada and Russia in the coming weeks, on the future of the ISS.

"And we will have discussions with other countries and states worldwide," said Woerner.

"We need an idea of where to go and what to do."

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