

NASA, ESA discuss sending first European to moon

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Side view of the crater Moltke taken from Apollo 10. Credit: Public Domain

The European Space Agency and NASA on Wednesday talked up the prospect of putting the first European on the moon, as they signed a deal strengthening collaboration for future lunar exploration.

The space agencies had already agreed that three European astronauts would fly on the Orion spacecraft to NASA's Gateway, a [space station](#) that will orbit the moon as part of the Artemis program.

Now it seems one of those astronauts will go a step further.

"We look forward to having an ESA astronaut join us on the surface of the moon and continuing to build on our longstanding, critical partnership," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said after attending an ESA council meeting in the Netherlands.

"NASA is counting on cooperation with ESA to propel exploration of the moon through the Artemis program," Nelson said in a statement, adding that "the European Service Module is the powerhouse of the Orion spacecraft".

The agencies also signed a deal on the Lunar Pathfinder, a planned communications satellite being built by British firm SSTL.

The ESA bought SSTL's services last year and will provide NASA with lunar communication under the deal. In exchange, NASA will launch the Pathfinder into orbit.

The two space agencies will also carry out joint tests to create a satellite

navigation network on the moon, "just as today we navigate using Galileo and GPS on Earth," the ESA statement said.

They also discussed the future of the ESA's ExoMars mission, after its planned launch on a Russian rocket later this year was canceled due to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The ESA has previously said it hopes to work with NASA to launch the mission, which will drill for [signs of life](#) on Mars.

Nelson said that "NASA is determining how best to support our European friends on the ExoMars mission".

ESA director general Josef Aschbacher told a press conference that "intense discussion" was being held on the subject.

"It's going the right way and I am very confident that we find a good partnership on ExoMars," he added.

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