

# European Space Agency chief eyes tapping private industry partners

April 19 2023, by Lucie AUBOURG

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Josef Aschbacher, director general of the European Space Agency, speaks in Paris, November 23, 2022.

European Space Agency director Josef Aschbacher promised a "transformation" of the continent's space sector in the coming years

during an interview with AFP, including more collaboration between government and private industry.

Private firms will be "encouraged to be a partner and not only a contractor," Aschbacher said, answering questions on the sidelines of an aerospace industry conference taking place this week in Colorado Springs, in the United States.

US [space](#) agency NASA has long incorporated [private firms](#) into its [space exploration](#), planning to send its astronauts to commercial orbiting outposts once the International Space Station is retired.

But any major reorientation of the European [space program](#) will need to be discussed at the second European space summit, to be held in Seville, Spain, in November.

Here are Aschbacher's answers to questions posed Tuesday by AFP.

## **When will we know more about Europe's vision for space?**

Towards the space summit at the end of the year, I think we'll have a clearer picture of what is Europe's ambition in the next decade, which decisions we need to prepare today in order to get there. So there's a lot of work that's happening right now in Europe.

I'm preparing the scenarios, and I'm preparing the facts, so that politicians can make a decision. It's up to them.



The European Space Agency's JUICE probe blasts into space on April 14, 2023 aboard an Ariane 5 rocket from Europe's spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana, on a mission to explore Jupiter's icy moons.

## **What are the different scenarios?**

It will be a phased approach. Certainly one step is cargo transport to low-Earth orbit (LEO), for commercial space stations—because the [space station](#) by the end of the decade will be deorbited. We need a future LEO presence for Europe to continue our research.

Second point is to get astronauts to LEO.

Then the next block is to the Moon. That means first cargo not only to the Moon but also back from the Moon, and eventually astronauts to the Moon.

And then of course there's a long-term perspective of going beyond the Moon towards Mars, but this is really further ahead.

So for these various scenarios, we will develop architectures. What does it mean, what hardware, what are the cost estimates.... But it's also clear that this will be quite a different approach compared to how we procure today.

So this will be a transformation of the space sector in Europe, which we also see here in the United States.

## **How will the sector be transformed?**

Industry certainly will be not only invited, but encouraged to be a partner and not only a contractor. And we, ESA, we're not only a customer but a partner.

That means we build up technology with them and for them. They have to engage, they have to commit. We provide the long-term framework and guarantee, we are a long-term anchor customer, but they need to provide the solution.

We really would like to make them much more a driver in this new architectural buildup. Also them coming with money, which may be coming from their own sources. So that is really a new way of building up a space program.

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Citation: European Space Agency chief eyes tapping private industry partners (2023, April 19) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2023-04-european-space-agency-chief-eyes.html>

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