

# European crew poised for private mission to International Space Station

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A four-member, all-European crew are poised to blast off in a SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule fixed to the top of a Falcon 9 rocket at 4:49 pm local time (2111 GMT) on Thursday from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

An all-European crew including Turkey's first astronaut are poised to blast off to the International Space Station in a mission with Axiom Space, as countries hungry for a taste of space turn increasingly to the private sector.

The launch, Axiom's third, is scheduled to see the four-member crew lift off in a SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule fixed to the top of a Falcon 9 rocket at 4:49 pm local time (2111 GMT) on Thursday from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

"It marks a new era of opportunity for countries to join the international [space](#) community" and "shifts the paradigm of how space agencies access LEO (low Earth orbit), for exploration and research in microgravity," Axiom Space's chief of [mission](#) integration and operations Derek Hassmann said of Axiom Mission 3 (Ax-3).

It is the first ISS mission for Axiom where all three of the paid seats have been bought by national agencies, rather than by wealthy individuals.

Turkish pilot and air force colonel Alper Gezeravci is joined by Marcus Wandt from Sweden, who will be the second Swede in space, and Walter Villadei, an Italian air force colonel who has previously flown to the edge of space on a Virgin Galactic spaceplane.

The crew are led by Axiom's Chief Astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria, a Spanish and US citizen and former NASA astronaut.

The exact costs haven't been disclosed, but in 2018 when the company first announced the program, which involves chartering SpaceX hardware and paying NASA for services, it set a price tag of \$55 million per seat.



Left to right: Axiom Space's chief astronaut and former NASA astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria, Walter Villadei of Italy, European Space Agency project astronaut Marcus Wandt of Sweden and Turkish Astronaut Alper Gezeravci.

More recently, Hungary was reported by [spacenews.com](https://spacenews.com) to be planning a \$100 million deal with Axiom for a future mission involving one astronaut.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has displayed a keen interest in the mission, presenting Gezeravci to the Turkish public in the runup to his re-election last year, and calling the 21-year air force veteran a "heroic Turkish pilot."

"We see it as a new symbol of the growing, stronger and assertive Turkey," Erdogan said about the space mission on Tuesday.

Sweden's Marcus Wandt, meanwhile, applied for the European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut class of 2022 but was made a reserve. Axiom-3 therefore allows Sweden to put its second national in space.

The Axiom-3 team will join seven crew currently aboard the ISS—from Japan, Denmark, the United States and Russia—and carry out 30 experiments, learning more about the impact of microgravity on the [human body](#), advancing industrial processes and more.

Axiom-3 was previously scheduled to launch on Wednesday, but SpaceX posted on X it was holding another day to "complete pre-launch checkouts and data analysis on the vehicle."

On Tuesday Benji Reed, the senior director of human spaceflight at SpaceX, said engineering teams had discovered certain [technical issues](#) in the way the Dragon capsule's landing parachutes deployed, and how it was attached to the Falcon 9 rocket, but said both problems had been resolved.

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