

Astronauts from Turkey, Italy and Sweden return to Earth, ending private space station trip

February 9 2024, by Marcia Dunn



This photo provided by Axiom Space shows a SpaceX capsule parachuting into the Atlantic Ocean on Friday, Feb. 9, 2024 off the Florida coast. Astronauts from Turkey, Italy and Sweden returned to Earth on Friday, ending a private three-week mission to the International Space Station. Credit: Axiom Space via AP

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ending a private three-week mission to the International Space Station.

The trio were accompanied by a retired NASA astronaut who now works for Axiom Space, the Houston company that arranged the chartered flight. The crew returned in a SpaceX capsule that parachuted into the Atlantic off the Florida coast.

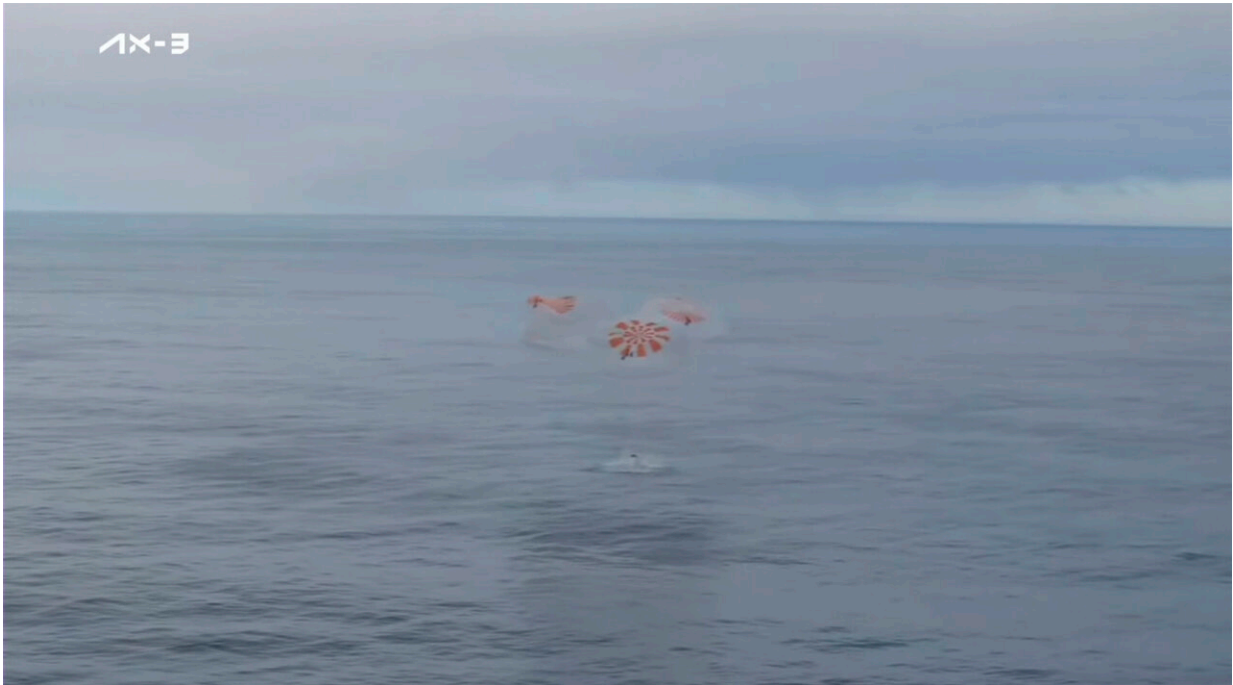
Turkey celebrated Alper Gezeravci's launch from Cape Canaveral last month. A former fighter pilot and captain for Turkish Airlines, he became the first person from his country to fly in space.

Gezeravci was joined on the trip by Italian Air Force Col. Walter Villadei, Sweden's Marcus Wandt, a former fighter pilot chosen as a reserve astronaut by the European Space Agency in 2022 and Michael Lopez-Alegria, their escort.

Turkey, Italy and Sweden financed the mission, paying roughly \$55 million apiece. It was Axiom's third private mission to the space station; the fourth is planned later this year.



This photo provided by Axiom Space shows astronauts giving a thumbs up after the SpaceX capsule parachuted into the Atlantic Ocean and was placed aboard a recovery vessel on Friday, Feb. 9, 2024 off the Florida coast. Astronauts from Turkey, Italy and Sweden returned to Earth on Friday, ending a private three-week mission to the International Space Station. Credit: Axiom Space via AP



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In this image from video provided by NASA, the 11 International Space Station crew members representing Expedition 70 (red shirts) and Axiom Space 3 (dark blue suits) crews gather for a farewell ceremony calling down to mission controllers on Earth on Friday, Feb. 2, 2024. Front row from left are Italy's Walter Villadei, Turkey's Alper Gezeravci and Sweden's Marcus Wandt. Above them hanging upside down in blue is Axiom Space's Michael Lopez-Alegria, a former NASA astronaut. Credit: NASA via AP

Before leaving the space station, Gezeravci thanked his country for its "bold and determined decision" to send a citizen into space as part of its 100th anniversary as a republic.

While in [orbit](#), the [astronauts](#) conducted science experiments and chatted with schoolchildren and officials from their countries. They enjoyed a few extra days at the space station, waiting for the weather to improve in the splashdown zone.

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