

Space station could operate until 2028, says consortium

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In the grasp of the Canadarm2, the cupola was relocated from the forward port to the Earth-facing port of the International Space Station's newly installed Tranquility node in this NASA image obtained in February 2010. The consortium of agencies building the ISS wants to see if the orbital outpost can operate until 2028, the European Space Agency (ESA) said on Thursday.

The consortium of agencies building the International Space Station (ISS) wants to see if the orbital outpost can operate until 2028, the European Space Agency (ESA) said on Thursday.

"There are no identified technical constraints to continuing ISS operations beyond the current planning horizon of 2015 to at least 2020," it said in a press release after a meeting of ISS partners in Tokyo.

"The partnership is currently working to certify on-orbit elements

through 2028," it said.

The Tokyo meeting gathered space agency heads from the United States, which is shouldering the main burden of building the ISS, from Canada, Japan and Russia and as well as from ESA.

Costing a reputed 100 billion dollars, the ISS has been hit by budget overruns and setbacks, including the loss of two of the US space shuttles, used to hoist components into low Earth orbit.

The station is due to be completed this year after a 12-year construction effort.

But its future beyond 2015 has recently been under cloud because of NASA's budget constraints.

That sparked fears within ESA that years of investment will yield little scientific reward before the station is mothballed.

In his draft spending plans for 2011, President Barack Obama pledged to extend the US commitment to the ISS to 2020 or beyond, [NASA](#) said in February.

Obama also confirmed the shuttle fleet's phaseout this year, promised help for commercial manned missions in space and dropped the so-called Constellation programme his predecessor George W. Bush announced in 2004 to return Americans to the Moon by 2020.

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