

Bremen, 26 November 2025, ~14:00 hrs

Dear Ministers, State Secretaries, dear Commissioner, dear delegates, colleagues, distinguished guests,

Also from my side, welcome to Bremen for ESA's Council Meeting at Ministerial Level 2025.

Let me start my presentation of the Director General's proposal with a very short movie that sets the context of why space is important, today and in the future.

----- 3 min MOVIE -----

There is one simple reason why we invited you here today: to write history together.

In the next two days, your leadership, your decisions, and your commitment will shape the course of Europe for decades to come.

You will decide how you convert the vast opportunities of space for the benefit of your economies and citizens.

You will choose the space solutions that will help us observe, understand and protect our planet. You will decide on Europe's growth through a competitive industry and through high value jobs. It lies in your hands to further expand the use of space to our defence and security users. And your decisions will influence whether, and when, Europe will land on the Moon, and whether Europe will be the first to discover extraterrestrial life and unlock the mysteries of our universe.

What a unique, what an exciting opportunity, for all of you - for all of us!

At the same time, this opportunity comes with profound responsibility. Since our last Ministerial in 2022, the world has changed profoundly. The enduring security threats from Russia, the realisation that Europe needs to defend itself, and the increasing pressures on our societies, democracies, values and economies makes us realise that **we face a perfect storm**.

A perfect storm that demands courageous decisions.

During the last two weeks, world leaders met in Brazil to keep the Paris Agreement alive, unfortunately with modest success. Climate change will remain the world's biggest challenge, in 10 years and in 100 years. Observations from space reveal a truth that is far more than inconvenient. Last year was the hottest year in the 175-years observation record. Devastating floods struck Spain, the Czech Republic, Germany and Poland, claiming hundreds of lives. And just a few days ago, Italy and Greece suffered from severe floods. Wildfires last summer burnt thousands of hectares across Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Canada.

Simultaneously, space has become ever more strategic. The war in Ukraine started in space one day before Russian troops entered Ukrainian soil. And space technology keeps Ukrainian troops informed and connected to defend themselves and with it, us in Europe. Europe is in a rapid catch-up phase. Around the world, defence spending makes up 50% of all space budgets, in Europe it is less than 15%.

Geopolitical instabilities call for a stronger, more independent and more autonomous European space capability.

Your decisions at this Council will determine Europe's leverage at every negotiation table; for negotiations on climate, on security and economic aspects.

On another front of this perfect storm, the economic pressure is mounting. National budgets are tight, while the new space race accelerates day by day.

The facts are merciless. The United States represents less than 20% of global GDP, yet invests 60% of the world's space budget. Meanwhile, all your countries' economies combined account for 24% of global GDP, but together we invest only 10% of the global space budget. This is not a winning position.

And you don't want the same to happen in space as what happened in information technology, where Europe's skills 20 years ago were on a similar level as in the US, but today the largest IT companies are not in Europe.

Ministers,

The context of this Council exposes European vulnerabilities on all fronts. Let us be honest: do we truly believe that these crises are only temporary disruptions? And do we really want to retreat to narrow, exclusively national solutions that may feel simpler, but leave us all weaker?

I am convinced there is another way. For more than 50 years, ESA is standing among the most capable space actors in the world, for a reason. ESA, which is the ESA you created, is quite unique. We pool resources and pursue a single

strategy. We draw on thousands of engineers and scientists in-house, and a highly skilled industrial and scientific base across all your countries. ESA delivers scientific excellence and Nobel prize winners. Our missions are often the only, the first, or the furthest. When Europe unites, Europe succeeds.

Today, I present a clear **action plan – with five goals** to navigate the storm and regain momentum.

First, **protecting our planet and climate**. Your continuously high investments in ESA, paired with an outstanding partnership with the European Union, has made Europe the undisputed world leader in Earth observation.

I want us to preserve and strengthen this position. Because you want to leave a beautiful planet behind for your children, but you also have economic reasons. The European Environment Agency estimates, weather and climate-related extremes have cost 820 billion euro across the EU in the last 45 years. A quarter of these losses occurred in the last three years. The cost of inaction is unimaginable.

This is why I want us to modernise our Earth observation systems. Not only more data, but smarter data.

We will build a digital twin of Planet Earth. With one click, you will be able to visualise how much a global temperature increase translates into a local sea-

level rise, and quantify the impact on your citizens. Real-time simulations will revolutionise crisis management and help save lives and losses.

We will also increase sustainability in space, sending up satellites that can repair, refuel, and extend other satellites' lifetimes. We call it in-orbit servicing and ability to act.

Our planet is also facing threats from far above. Planetary defence against asteroids is far more serious than you might think. The next asteroid, called Apophis, will come very close to planet Earth, on ... Friday 13th, 2029. I have a proposal on your table and, if Ramses is funded, it will encounter and study the incoming asteroid that will be visible with the naked eye.

The **second goal** of my action plan brings me to the very heart of space, to **explore and discover**. For a long time, the science programme at ESA was kept at almost zero net growth. Just imagine what you could discover by embracing a higher level of ambition.

I propose to do that. With the support of you, we can seek answers to the most fundamental questions: What is the structure of our Universe? What is the origin of our Solar System? And is there life out there? Three proposals seek the answers: LISA, the first space system to detect gravitational waves, once predicted by Albert Einstein; NewAthena, an X-ray telescope, the largest of its kind, to study the most extreme events in the Universe, like supermassive black holes. And we will prepare for humanity's first astrobiology mission to Enceladus

- the place beyond Earth which scientists consider most likely to harbour accessible life - if it exists.

Space science is not a luxury. Reaching out for the unknown and trying to understand the universe is deeply rooted in human nature. ESA allows humanity to live that dream.

As the United States, China, and India fly to the Moon, we will jointly make sure Europe will not stay behind. The Moon is our next destination, where the Argonaut and Moonlight missions will secure us a position in the global lunar race.

Our contributions to NASA's Gateway are a crucial asset for international cooperation. Without ESA's European Service Modules, Artemis astronauts, including European ones, would not fly towards and to the Moon. We are not a sidekick, we are a protagonist in humanity's return to the Moon.

ESA will also achieve a 'first' in exploring Mars. The Rosalind Franklin rover will be the first, and so far, only mission to drill two metres into the Martian surface to search for traces of ancient life. Just yesterday I received very good news from NASA to confirm their contribution to the Rosalind Franklin Mission.

It is with good reason that ESA has also intensified cooperation with Canada, Japan, India, South Korea, New Zealand, the United Arab Emirates, and Australia.

Since many decades, Canada is making good use of its special status as an ESA Cooperating State. Thank you, Canada, for your strong engagement at this Ministerial.

All over the world, ESA is recognised as a competent, respected and reliable partner.

Our objectives in exploration are clear: reduce dependency, build autonomous capability and diversify partnerships. Europe is stronger than it sometimes realises.

Ministers,

This Ministerial must respond to geopolitical realities of our time. The **third goal** provides a plan to **increase European autonomy and resilience**.

I will do whatever it takes to ensure independent access to space with our European launchers Ariane 6 and Vega-C. I will deliver on the decisions made in Sevilla in 2023. We target 27 Ariane 6 launches between 2027 and 2029, and 16 Vega-C launches in the next four years. In parallel, we will upgrade the European Spaceport in Kourou and welcome other European launchers.

Through the European Launcher Challenge, we initiate a true paradigm shift. ESA will not develop the next heavy launcher itself, but, as an anchor customer, rely on industry to develop cost-effective, modern launch systems with partners and technologies of their choice. ESA will be a long-term customer and technology developer. Demand first. Delivery next. Market growth follows.

The Leo Cargo Return Service is another element on your table, to implement the 2023 Sevilla decision, to prepare an autonomous European capacity for cargo transport to and from Low Earth Orbit.

Ministers,

The perfect storm that I described earlier also requires a stronger focus on security and defence. You asked me to prepare the European Resilience from Space - or ERS – programme proposal. Space is dual use by nature and has always been. It is time to fully embrace this, also at European level.

ERS, with its three equally important components - Earth Observation, PNT and secure connectivity - will provide you with a joint crisis response and intelligence infrastructure. It will task, observe, fuse and disseminate critical data. More frequent observations. Secure communication. Smarter decisions. Near real-time fire and flood maps. Security alerts in minutes, not days.

Member States will always retain full control of national security assets. ERS will therefore develop a European system-of-systems architecture to allow pooling and sharing of national assets, and to be enhanced by European ones.

With IRIS², the European Union, together with ESA will develop its flagship for secure, multi-orbit communications. ESA will provide technical expertise, develop critical technologies and qualify and validate the system end-to-end, including ground and cyber.

On Navigation, I want us to continue delivering the best navigation system and reach unprecedented accuracy and resilience with LEO-PNT. Navigation as you know is crucial for society, the economy, safety and security of our people.

Ministers,

In space, it is not enough to have good ideas. We need hardware in orbit, ground segments on the surface, and services on the market. Therefore, the **fourth goal** of my action plan aims to **reinforce support to Europe's industrial base**, to boost growth, profitability and competitiveness. We will de-risk innovation, attract private capital, and accelerate R&D to market maturity through dedicated programmes like ARTES 4.0 or ACCESS.

We are on the right track. Our network of ESA Business Incubation Centres, or BICs, is the largest of its kind in Europe, perhaps worldwide. We incubated more than 2,000 startups over 20 years. Our ESA Investors Network now counts over 70 members, mostly venture capital funds and large banks. Last year, we attracted 1.5 billion euro of private funding to complement your public funding, an increase by 56% compared to the year before. This is astounding.

I am also pleased to invite you to a special event. The European Investment Bank will announce a Space Lending Facility: an initial 500 million euro in debt

financing for European space SMEs and mid-caps to support industrialisation and scale-up. Please join us for the announcement later today.

As you know, today's global space economy is worth 530 billion euro. The World Economic Forum predicts that number to triple in a decade, meaning an annual growth rate of more than 10%. Tell me other economic sectors with similar growth rates.

While boosting growth, I want to make sure we keep up with strategic technologies of the future. With the GSTP programme, we will focus on AI, quantum technologies, innovative propulsion, cybersecurity, and robotics. We will unlock new markets and make sure your industry is ready for the future.

Ameca, our humanoid robot, is one example that symbolises this future. You may have seen her at the entrance. Please feel free to talk to her in your native language. But please, give her grace – she is still learning.

Ministers,

The **fifth goal** is simple yet profound:. Inspiration changes lives, long before technology does.

If we inspire young people to study STEM subjects, to build and to explore, we will clear many obstacles before we reach them. We will strengthen Europe's position in the world and shape a future where our continent continues to lead and attract the best people.

Three years ago, I introduced Europe's new class of astronauts. Today, they have completed basic training, and the first ones are preparing for their flight assignments starting with Sophie Adenot. My warmest greetings to all the astronauts who are with us in this room today.

You are such powerful ambassadors; you have a profound impact on millions of people who see themselves in you. They dream bigger because of you.

Ministers,

Many of the proposals on your table are carried out in close cooperation with the European Union. Our excellent cooperation is already delivering the world's best programmes in Earth observation and navigation and soon secure communication. The EU will boost its space budget in the next Multi-annual Financial Framework from 2028 onwards. You can count on me to align closely with Commissioner Kubilius and his team. Commissioner, Andrius, thank you for being with us. Your presence is a strong signal: Europe is pulling together on space. ESA stands ready to deepen this partnership and support you.

Ministers,

To bring the ESA Strategy 2040 to life, I present a 22-billion-euro proposal for the next three years, an action plan that is tailored to your national priorities and financial realities.

Together with your delegates, we have built this plan, day by day, line by line, for more than a year, right up to the very last moment. My sincere thanks to all those who have contributed to this immense task, including my own team.

In context, 22 billion is just 0.03% of your combined annual GDP. 22 billion means 15 euro per citizen per year. .

This proposal is solid to the core – tested, shaken, measured, and weighed, like a satellite before launch. To implement it, we need your approval and your funding.

Before we turn to this, however, I want to make you a promise. Two years ago, I began transforming ESA – less bureaucracy, faster delivery, simpler procedures, shorter times to contract, faster payments to industry and an independent project management authority. We have delivered in phase one. Next year, we continue with the next phase, ensuring that your ESA is even more agile and fit for the many challenges of the future.

Ministers,

In the face of this perfect storm, you must take a decision. Will you choose unity, or will you choose fragmentation? Will you choose complacency, or ambition?

If you choose ambition and unity, today can be the start of a new era of European space cooperation:

- with greater European autonomy and resilience from space;
- a deeper partnership with the European Union;
- and renewed economic growth and global competitiveness.

Allow me to be crystal clear: The era of thoughts and concerns is over. We are now in a period of action and consequences. To stand still is to fall behind. So let us place our faith in our own capabilities, in our own ingenuity, in our own industries.

Let us deliver what is expected of us, by more than 510 million citizens in your countries, by our international partners, by our space industries, and by our scientific communities.

Our shared success depends on each of you, without exception. Every contribution counts.

Who, if not you? When, if not now?

Let us show to the world - what a united Europe can truly achieve.

Thank you.