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Russia, China to sign cooperation deal on Moon exploration

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Russia and China will sign a space cooperation program for 2018-2022 in autumn to jointly explore the Moon and conduct the Earth's remote probing, Glavkosmos space launch operator told TASS on Thursday.

"Work is nearing completion with the direct role of Glavkosmos to draw up a program of Russian-Chinese space cooperation for 2018-2022, which should be signed in the autumn of 2017," the company said.

Glavkosmos is the coordinator and the contractor for a portion of the works in this program.

As Glavkosmos explained, cooperation with Chinese partners envisages the following areas: the exploration of the Moon and outer space, space vehicles and ground infrastructure, hardware components and materials, the Earth's remote sensing data.

Glavkosmos is also working with Chinese commercial partners on the issue of holding experiments aboard the International Space Station and providing the data of the Earth's remote sensing from Russian satellites, the company said.

Apart from China, Glavkosmos is also considering the possibilities of space cooperation with India, Brazil, South Africa, Nicaragua, Myanmar, Chile, Peru and Armenia and their involvement in Russian projects, the company said in its annual report.

Specifically, Glavkosmos is holding preparations in Brazil for a tender for the delivery of space images to that country.

It was reported earlier that China was interested in buying the world's most powerful Russian-made RD rocket engines produced by Energomash while Russian Space Systems showed interest in Chinese electronic components.

Russia and China are also working on making their GLONASS and BeiDou navigation satellite systems mutually complement each other and on installing adjusting ground-based stations on the territory of each other.

Besides, Russia and China are working within the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) format to create a unified system of the Earth's remote sensing.

International cooperation

As Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Cosmonautics Andrei Ionin said, Russia needs to look more actively for international partners to develop space projects.

"Building international partnership is, perhaps, the main strategic task for the entire Russian cosmonautics today. This is because the technological revolution, first of all, in micro-electronics, has made it possible from the viewpoint of investments the creation of space systems consisting of dozens and even hundreds of Earth remote sensing or communications satellites whose commercial success requires work on the markets, and also considering that the next stage of piloted flights is related to movement outside the bounds of the near-Earth space, which will require a sharp increase in expenditures on outer space," he told TASS.

According to the expert, broad and versatile international cooperation in the current situation is seen as a solution for Russian cosmonauts as it will help unite participants' technological competences and their markets, share risks and expenses.

"Moreover, the international status of a project is practical and insurmountable protection from the Finance Ministry's regular attempts to sequester space programs," the expert said.

In his opinion, considering the Western sanctions imposed on Russia, new

potential partners should include, in the first place, BRICS countries and also, possibly, Indonesia, the UAE, Vietnam, Iran and others.

"In this context, the agreements for the period until 2022 between Russia and China, which has both the competences and the resources and the vast internal market, are a move in the right direction but, considering the scope and the severity of the problems and tasks faced by our space industry, a move that displays little initiative, is too cautious, insufficiently large in scope and extremely slow," the expert said.

Glavkosmos

The space launch operator Glavkosmos was established in 1985 in the USSR Ministry of General Machine-Building. The company engaged in the space rocket industry's foreign economic activity, organized and held researches and participated in the work to convert defense enterprises to civil output.

Today Glavkosmos participates in the implementation of contracts for the launch of Soyuz rockets from the Kourou spaceport in French Guiana, organizes foreigners' flights to the International Space Station and cooperates with India and China in the space sphere.

The Russian government wholly owns Glavkosmos.

It was reported earlier that Glavkosmos got the status of an authorized operator of Soyuz-2 carrier rocket commercial launches from Russian cosmodromes.

Apart from this, Glavkosmos has received the exclusive rights to distribute images received from Russia's Kanopus-V and Resurs-P Earth's remote sensing satellites on foreign markets.

In 2017-2018, Glavkosmos plans to act as the operator of the launches of over 100 commercial micro-satellites as an additional load while orbiting three satellites under Russia's federal program. Of this number, 72 satellites were launched from the Baikonur spaceport on July 14. Another 40 satellites are planned to be launched from the Vostochny space center in the Russian Far East at the end of the year.

Russia's State Space Corporation Roscosmos announced in May that Glavkosmos and Kosmotras had set up a joint operator for the launch of spacecraft by Soyuz-2 and Dnepr carrier rockets from the Russian spaceports. The new operator was named Glavkosmos Launch Services (GK Launch Services). Glavkosmos holds 75% and Kosmotras 25% in the new operator.

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