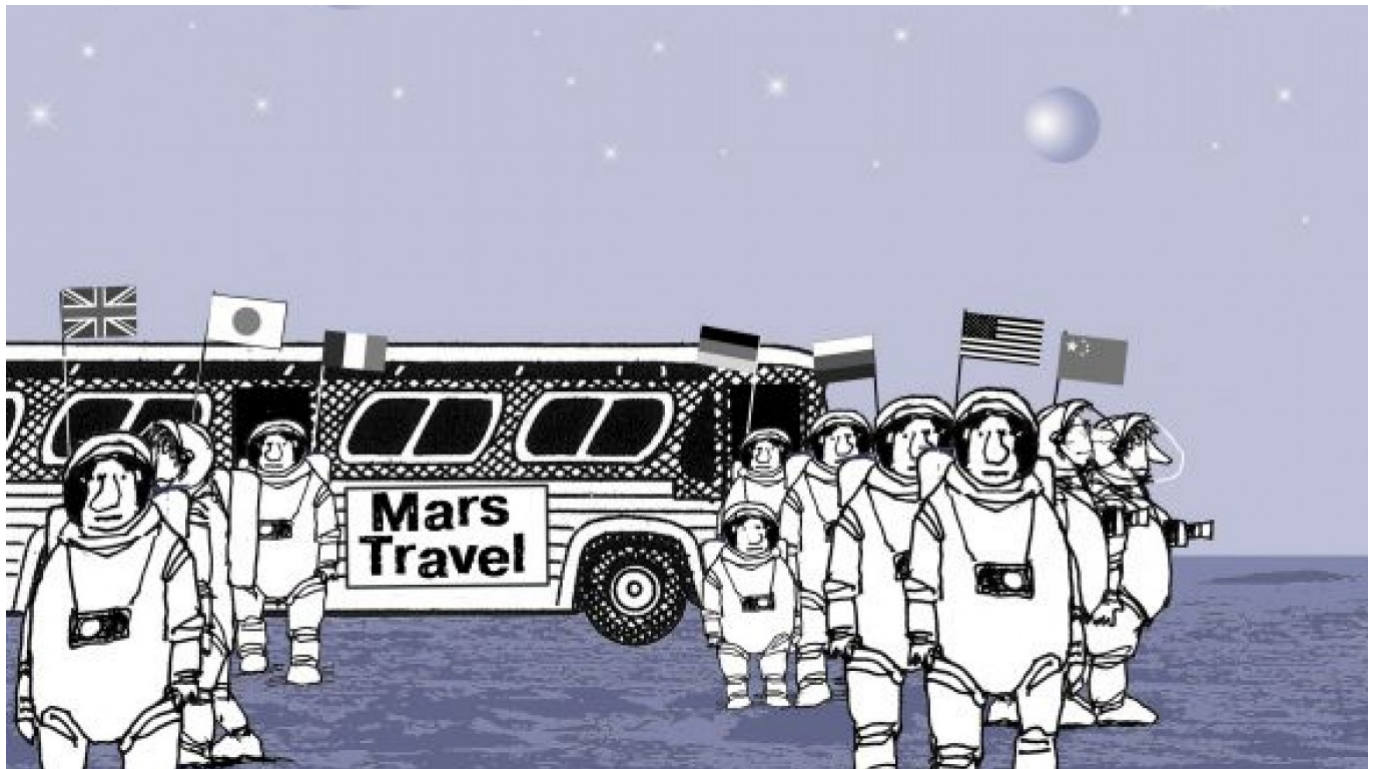


Think Big – Really Big – for a Cosmic Road Trip

By [The Moscow Times](#)

November 29, 2011



Space buffs around the world mourned the latest Russian space disaster in which a Mars-bound probe failed to make it out of Earth's orbit. But while President Dmitry Medvedev voiced the idea of punishing those guilty for such incidents, this \$163 million cloud could have a silver lining.

Federal Space Agency chief Vladimir Popovkin announced last week that Russia is talking to NASA and the European Space Agency about participating in future Mars expeditions and assisting in launches — reconfirming the realization that complex exploration goals can be reached only via collective effort.

This leads to nostalgia about that classic American tradition called “The Road Trip,” in which four or five students pool their resources (share the cost of gas, beer and lodging) to achieve a common goal of reaching a distant college campus, fraternity branch or spring break destination. ☒ No one in his right mind would go it alone: more cost and less fun.

Now is the time for our leaders to take the next bold step in space exploration.☒ The goals ahead are lofty but admirable: colonize the moon, put a human on Mars, and even go beyond our solar system.☒It is time to admit that no one nation can go it alone.☒Governments have a moral and fiscal obligation to join forces. The International Space Station has shown that cooperation brings results. It's time to think big. Really big. We are presented with an opportunity for nations to work together on equal terms to accomplish constructive goals. In the last hundred years we've seen several examples of such unity, albeit usually spurred by the need to defeat a common enemy.

But as of late, whether it's the International Space Station, extinguishing a burning reactor in Japan, or bombarding particles under the mountains of Switzerland, there have been instances of peaceful multinational nonprofit cooperation for a greater good.

Space exploration is a rare case where boldness and practicality unite. Economists agree that the amount of capital necessary is astronomical. Philosophers agree that humanity must learn to work together and get beyond its current fratricidal mania before it has the right to present itself to the galaxy.☒Both groups would see the rationale of a true international effort.

Current private initiatives in the United States and Europe to promote space exploration are laudable, but they are sufficient only for near-term tactical goals. A purely commercial approach lacks the strength-in-unity concept, the decades of experience that state space agencies have and the huge amount of capital that deep space exploration demands. Let private entrepreneurs focus on the \$267 billion commercial space market, while governments band together for greater accomplishments.

The Federal Space Agency, NASA and the European Space Agency, along with the Chinese and Japanese space agencies, could be reorganized as regional branches of an International Space Corporation, or ISC.☒This transnational state company should not be put under or anywhere near the bloated bureaucracy of the United Nations, but should function as a not-yet-for-profit☒entity. Each country could contribute funds, brains and bodies. Corporate headquarters might rotate between chosen cities of each of the founding agencies, on a five-year basis. It is only "not-yet" for profit — since it is clear that there is eventually much profit to be made in the cosmos from natural resources, tourism and so forth. The International Space Corporation would eventually fund itself.

There could☒be an initial share issue. National Geographic estimates that there are 2 billion people on the planet earning \$4,000 or more per year. If structured properly and marketed convincingly, every one of them could be convinced to purchase \$25 worth of equity in the long term but noble investment. Startup capital of \$50 billion would go a long way to getting the International Space Corporation close to the riches space has to offer, and facilitating financial return — if not for the original investor, then for his progeny. Shares would make a great holiday present for the grandkids, too.

Imagination and reason come together. We want our children to have a☒choice of McDonald's, sushi or Chinese take-out at the moon mall's food court. We want our grandchildren to eat borsht and papadums on their vacation trip to the Red Planet. Many of us are ready to welcome and even invest in this long-term trip. Perhaps Yuri Gagarin was remembering his student days, too,☒when he uttered his famous phrase just before lifting off.

He did not say, "I'm going." He said, "Let's go!"

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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