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Russia to Stick With ISS Till 2024 as It Preps for Moon Mission

By Matthew Bodner

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Under President Vladimir Putin the space program has seen a measurable increase in funding.

After months of uncertainty surrounding the long-term fate of the International Space Station, Russia's federal space agency Roscosmos has announced its desire to remain in the 15-nation program until 2024, an agency statement said late Tuesday night.

According to the statement by the agency's Scientific and Technical Council (STC), a senior internal planning body, Russia will then move onto a moon mission around 2030.

"Today we determined that the main aim [for the program] is to use the ISS to develop our lunar program in low Earth orbit, [before moving on to] deep space," Yury Koptev, head of the STC and a former Roscosmos chief, was quoted as saying in the statement.

Roscosmos said that they envision Russian-manned spaceflight following two lines of development over the next decade.

In the near term, Russia will continue to use ISS as a base for modernizing and expanding its domestic space assets.

Meanwhile, it will develop new technology to support the construction of a new national space station around 2024 or 2025, which will be built on the basis of Russia's segment of the current ISS.

Russia's portion of the ISS, originally designed to be the Soviet Union's Mir-2 space station, is technically capable of serving as an independent station, to which new space station modules could be added.

According to Roscosmos, the new national space station will ensure Russia's independent access to space, provide a base for the testing of new spacecraft, and eventually serve as a way station for Russian cosmonauts on their way to the moon around 2030.

Koptev was quoted in the statement as saying that there is a general consensus within the space agency and surrounding industry that this path of development is the proper course for Russia's space program.

However, the agency statement cautioned that no final decision had been made. "Detailed studies and final decisions will be made after hearing from the heads of space industry enterprises at subsequent meetings of the STC," the Roscosmos statement said.

The STC's work coincides with two other massive projects taking place in the Russian space community: the transformation of Roscosmos into a massive state-owned corporation, and the rewriting of the Federal Space Program 2016-2025 — a document that outlines the government's funding of space activities over the next decade.

Koptev said that the concept approved by the STC took into account possible funding changes, and will be updated in accordance with the goals of Roscosmos as it moves about reforming the space industry.

Under President Vladimir Putin the space program has seen a measurable increase in funding, with a large 1.8 trillion ruble ($29 billion) boost pledged last year to cover Russia's space activities through 2020.

Although an overall figure for Russia's 2025 space program has not been announced, the drastic decline of the ruble's value — around 50 percent to the dollar since the start of last year — is considered to be one of the reasons for the document's rewrite.

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