

Russia-Europe Mars Mission Delayed to 2022 Over Coronavirus

By [AFP](#)

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Roscosmos head Dmitry Rogozin. **Anton Kardashov / Moskva News Agency**

A joint Russian-European mission to Mars has been postponed for two years, the Russian and European space agencies said Thursday, citing the coronavirus and technical issues.

"We have made a difficult but well-weighed decision to postpone the launch to 2022," said Dmitry Rogozin, head of Russia's Roscosmos agency.

The unmanned ExoMars mission aims to place a robot on the Red Planet to find out whether life is present.

It was scheduled to launch later this year after experiencing several delays.

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Officials at the European and Russian spaces agencies said they agreed to delay the mission until August or September 2022 to carry out further tests.

Following recommendations by European and Russian inspectors, "ExoMars experts concluded that the tests necessary to make all the components of the spacecraft for the Mars adventure need more time to complete," the statement said.

European Space Agency director general Jan Wörner said both sides wanted to be "100%" sure of a successful mission.

"We cannot allow ourselves any margin of error. More verification activities will ensure a safe trip and the best scientific results on Mars," he said in a statement that did not mention the virus.

Rogozin specifically pointed to the impact of the outbreak of the coronavirus in Europe saying the "exacerbation of the epidemiological" situation had hampered the scheduled launch.

The Mars mission has been marred by a series of technical problems and delays.

In August last year, the ESA identified problems with the mission's parachute system, raising questions over whether the launch would go ahead in 2020.

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