

Funding for the “Moon Center” at Oberpfaffenhofen Approved.



Handover of the funding notification cheque at the DLR site in Oberpfaffenhofen

From left: Josef Aschbacher, ESA Director General, Prof. Dr.-Ing. Anke Kaysser-Pyzalla, Chair of the Executive Board of the DLR, Dr. Markus Soeder, Bavarian Minister-President, and Dr. Anke Pagels-Kerp, DLR Executive Board Member for Space. Image: 1/3, Credit: DLR (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0) [1]

On February 4, 2026, the Bavarian Minister-President Dr. Markus Soeder presented the funding cheque notification for the construction of the new control center to the DLR at the Oberpfaffenhofen site – received by the DLR Chairwoman Prof. Dr.-Ing. Anke Kaysser-Pyzalla, DLR Executive Board Member for Space Dr. Anke Pagels-Kerp and Director of the DLR Space Operations and Astronaut Training Facility Prof. Felix Huber.

A new control center for the astronautical spaceflight of tomorrow is being built at the German Aerospace Center (DLR) in Oberpfaffenhofen: the Human Exploration Control Center (HECC). In the future, both crewed and robotic missions to the Moon and Mars will be operated from the HECC. This new infrastructure will further strengthen Bavaria as a space hub. In cooperation with European partners, the control center will also make a significant contribution to securing national and European independence in space exploration. The Free State of Bavaria is funding the construction project with €58 million. The DLR is investing an additional €20 million from its institutional funding program with the federal and state governments and is responsible for implementing the development work for the Moon and Mars missions at the HECC.

From a Bavarian perspective, Minister-President Dr. Markus Soeder emphasizes:

"Bavaria's gateway to the stars is coming."

The Free State, the German Aerospace Center (DLR), and the European Space Agency (ESA) form a strong partnership. With innovation and a pioneering spirit, we are promoting research, freedom, and the future. Bavaria is investing 58 million euros in a new building and five million euros in the development of an orbital gateway and an AI project for astronaut support. The moon is our springboard into space – and perhaps one day the stopover on the way to Mars. From the moon, we

can research real-time monitoring of robots, self-sufficient energy systems, and sustainable living and working in space. This is the most exciting adventure of our time. But it also has concrete effects on our lives on Earth: As a space hub, Bavaria is creating numerous new technologies and jobs.

The Human Exploration Control Center (HECC) will primarily support the operation of the Gateway Lunar Space Station on the European side. To this end, GSOC is already developing operational procedures for the International Habitation Module (I-HAB), a key component of the Gateway. HECC will assume operational responsibility for a total of three modules: I-HAB, the Lunar Communication System (HLCS), and the ESPRIT Refueling Module (ERM). The Gateway is scheduled for construction this decade and will orbit the Moon as humanity's next outpost in space. With this return to the Moon, the Artemis program also aims to prepare for future crewed missions to Mars. The construction of HECC is taking place, as was the case for the ISS-Columbus operation, in proven, close cooperation with ESA and NASA partners. [1]

European Moonport Company

During the funding notification ceremony in Oberpfaffenhofen, on February 4, 2026 - in the presence of Bavarian Minister President Dr. Markus Soeder, OHB's Chief Marco Fuchs announced the founding of the ***European Moonport Company***. The new entity, headquartered at OHB's site in Oberpfaffenhofen near Munich, will consolidate the company's activities related to future lunar missions in Bavaria. Europe's ambition to take a leading role in humanity's return to the Moon is being supported by the development of a dedicated European lunar infrastructure. Cooperation with the close-by located HECC is expected.

Together with Munich Airport International, OHB has developed an initial concept for a central launch and landing facility on the lunar surface, which was presented at today's event. A Moonport, serving as a reliable hub for logistics flights and crewed spacecraft, is a key enabler for the emergence of a lunar economic ecosystem.

“With the founding of the European Moonport Company, we are supporting Europe's ambition to establish a long-term presence on the Moon under its own power and to create the foundation for future scientific missions and economic activities,” says Marco Fuchs, CEO of OHB SE. “For us as a company, the Moon has always been a fascinating destination. This long-standing enthusiasm is now becoming tangible: We aim not only to accompany Europe's journey to the Moon, but to actively help shape it.”

As a space company with decades of experience in conducting studies and projects related to space exploration – and with a broad network of industrial and academic partners – OHB is excellently positioned to play a leading role in shaping the vision of a permanent European infrastructure on the lunar surface. [2]

ESA Argonaut Lander Program

To round off the European “Moon Initiative” ESA developed the **Argonaut Lander Program**:

Argonaut, represents Europe's autonomous, versatile and reliable access to the Moon. For the first time, the industrial team behind the project was presented to the media on November 20, 2025.

The European Space Agency presented the Thales Alenia Space Italy-led consortium for its lunar lander programme, Argonaut, at a press conference held at the European Astronaut Centre (EAC) in Cologne, Germany. Thales Alenia Space in Italy, the prime contractor, has signed agreements with Thales Alenia Space in France, OHB AG, Thales Alenia Space in the UK and Nammo Space (UK).

The consortium is responsible for the design, development and production of the Argonaut Lunar Descent Element, the transport element of Argonaut, which will offer Europe autonomous access to

the lunar surface. Thanks to this state-of-the-art technology, ESA will be able to implement European-led missions that will support the study of the Moon, allow the de-risking of key technologies, and pave the way for human exploration.

Argonaut will also play a key role in international lunar exploration, supporting NASA's Artemis program. The European lander can transport a variety of cargo, including vital resources for astronauts such as food, water and air, as well as rovers, science instruments, and infrastructures for communication and power generation.

“The presented European industrial partners will lead the development of our *Argonaut Lunar Descent Element*, a key capability for Europe’s future missions to the Moon surface. This state-of-the-art equipment will allow us to send a mass of roughly 1500 kilograms to the lunar surface with the support of the European launcher, Ariane 6. A European autonomous access to the Moon for our Member States,” said Daniel Neuenschwander, Director of Human and Robotic Exploration at ESA.
[3]

References:

[1] <https://www.dlr.de/de/aktuelles/nachrichten/2026/mond-und-mars-im-blick-neues-kontrollzentrum-fuer-astronautische-raumfahrt-geplant>

[2] <https://www.ohb.de/en/news/ohb-founds-european-moonport-company>

[3] https://www.esa.int/Newsroom/Press_Releases/ESA_and_Thales_Alenia_Space_present_the_industrial_consortium_for_Argonaut_Lunar_Descent_Element