
News Archive Space 2009

Welcome to Cologne - Alexander Gerst at the European Astronaut Centre

9 July 2009



Alexander Gerst at the European Astronaut Centre

The new German astronaut Alexander Gerst introduced himself to the German public for the first time on 9 July 2009 at the European Astronaut Centre (EAC), which is situated on the Cologne site of the German Aerospace Center (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt; DLR). Gerst joined the astronaut corps of the European Space Agency (ESA) in May 2009. Prior to that, he underwent an extensive selection process that culminated in his being chosen, together with five other candidates, from a total of 8413 applicants. The 33-year old geophysicist will commence his astronaut training in September at EAC.

At his future workplace, Alexander Gerst was welcomed by the Parliamentary Secretary of State at the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie; BMWi), Peter Hintze, by the Director General of ESA, Jean-Jacques Dordain, by the Chairman of the DLR Executive Board, Prof. Johann-Dietrich Wörner and by Simonetta Di Pippo, ESA Director of Human Spaceflight. Mr Hintze stressed the significance of space travel for Germany as one of the leading industrialised nations: "With technologies developed for space travel which can also be transferred to terrestrial applications, our industry and business sector can really hold up its head proudly to its competitors in the international arena. The selection of Alexander Gerst is a logical progression for Germany's decades of traditional commitment to manned space travel."



Press conference with the German astronaut Alexander Gerst on 9 July 2009

Prof. Wörner, addressed a quotation from Johannes Keplers to Alexander Gerst: "Let us build ships and sails which are suitable for the air in the heavens. Then we shall find people who are unafraid of the featureless vastness of space." Prof. Wörner then went on to say: "The tasks expected of the new generation of astronauts include operation and research on the International Space Station (ISS)."

The future ESA astronaut was born in 1976 – the same year as Sigmund Jähn, who became Germany's first astronaut. Since that time, 13 Germans have completed the astronaut training programme, a tradition to which Alexander Gerst will now add his own name. However, space travel is not an end in itself for Gerst: instead, it serves science and business. The vulcanologist does, however, see parallels between space travel and his chosen course of academic study: "We go to the Antarctic to learn a little more about our own volcanoes in Europe, and that is similar in a way to space travel. By that I mean that you go into space in order to find something out that affects us here on Earth."



New European astronauts

Meanwhile, firmly down on Earth, Alexander Gerst first eagerly anticipates his astronaut training. Alexander Gerst will accomplish his 'basic training' together with his five team colleagues: the Italian Samantha Cristoforetti, the Dane Andreas Mogensen, the Italian Luca Parmitano, the Briton Timothy Peake and the Frenchman Thomas Pesquet.

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