

# NO EUROPEAN MARS MISSION THIS YEAR DUE TO UKRAINE WAR

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Owing to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Europe will no longer be attempting this year to send its first rover to Mars.

And if cooperation on the mission with Roscosmos, Russia's state space corporation, cannot be resumed, then it's likely to be 2026 or 2028 before the ExoMars rover is blasted off toward the red planet, the European Space Agency said Thursday.

Previous plans to launch the probe with Russia this September are now "practically impossible but also politically impossible," said the agency's director, Dr. Josef Aschbacher. "This year, the launch is gone."

The ESA had previously said that the mission was "very unlikely". The decision to suspend cooperation with Roscosmos was taken by ESA's ruling council, at a meeting this week in Paris.

"We deeply deplore the human casualties and tragic consequences of the aggression towards Ukraine," an ESA statement said. "While recognising the impact on scientific exploration of space, ESA is fully aligned with the sanctions imposed on Russia by its member states."

Because of their respective orbits around the Sun, Mars is only readily reachable from Earth every two years. The earliest next launch window would be 2024. But if sanctions on Russia haven't been lifted by then, enabling cooperation with Roscosmos to resume, then that window could be missed, too.

Unpicking Russia's imprints on the rover mission and replacing Russian components with parts from elsewhere will take time.

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