



A European Path to Human Space Exploration

Gerhard Thiele

European Space Policy Institute, Schwarzenbergplatz 6 A-1030 Wien, +43 (0) 1 718 11 18 28, gerhard.thiele@espi.or.at, Austria

The urge of humans to transcend boundaries, be they physical or intellectual, is apparent throughout the history of humankind. Today one of its most visible manifestations is the endeavour to leave Earth and travel into space. The International Space Station has become the most visible sign of this endeavour, Human Space Exploration. Countries from around the globe, with very different cultural backgrounds, have joined their forces and resources to create this first outpost of humans in space on a long-term time scale.

The question “why do humans venture into space”, however, cannot not readily be answered.

In the debate about the human motivation often utilitarian viewpoints are stressed, neglecting the intrinsic desire of humans to explore and the need of life to expand. While for such intrinsic desire no mathematically strict proof can be found the mere observation of the development of life on Earth exacts this conclusion.

The fact that different cultures around the globe share this view on Human Space Exploration raises the question what might be a specific European approach in this quest. A first answer could be derived from the Charta of the European Astronaut Corps, which in its vision statement “Shaping and Sharing Human Space Exploration in Unity through Diversity” recognises key elements of exploration (Shaping and sharing) as well as a characteristic European approach (Unity Through Diversity). These ideas are furthered in the values, which spell out the word SPACE in their Latin version: Sapientia, Populus, Audacia, Cultura, Exploratio. The decision for Human Space Exploration is a wise choice and essential for humankind to grow.