

Space Deals Signed

By [The Moscow Times](#)

June 20, 2013

The  **Moscow Times**

PARIS — The European Space Agency signed final contracts with Thales Alenia Space Italy for work on a pair of missions to assess if the planet Mars has or ever had life, officials said at the Paris Airshow this week.

Until last year, the ExoMars program was a joint project between ESA and the U.S. space agency NASA. But NASA dropped out, citing budget problems.

The Russian space agency Roscosmos stepped in to provide two Proton rockets to send an orbiting atmospheric probe and test lander to Mars in January 2016 and a follow-on rover in August 2018 that will drill below the planet's surface to look for spores and bacteria.

Roscosmos also is providing a landing system for the rover and scientific instruments.

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