

Team from Barcelona seeks China's help to launch Moon probe

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A group of companies in Spain's Catalonia region that designed a lunar module project for the Google Lunar X Prize competition traveled to China to present their initiative and seek support.

"We've come to China to present our Moon project at a conference and show the impact we expect it to have for Catalonian and Spanish industry. In addition, we want to establish cooperation with China to possibly launch our robot from here," Jorge Fuentes, the assistant director of Barcelona's Aeronautic and Space Technology Center, or CTAE, told Efe.

Fuentes is the representative of the Catalonia Moon Discovery Group, which is presently participating in the Global Lunar Conference in Beijing.

The meeting, organized by the International Astronautical Federation, brought together scientists, professionals, institutions and large companies in the aerospace sector who are participating in projects linked with the new wave of exploration having the Moon as its objective.

The Catalanian proposal was received "with a lot of interest" by the state-owned China Great Wall Industry Corporation, which expressed a willingness to participate in the project.

CGWIC already has participated in rocket launchings and satellites for Brazil, Venezuela and other emerging countries.

The option of a space launch from Chinese territory is attractive both for its economic aspect as well as because of the possibilities for starting a "broader" cooperative effort with the Asian giant, whose ambitious space program includes Moon and Mars landings in the coming decades.

The Catalanian project is headed by Galactic Suite Design, a company which specializes in developing aerospace projects, and the New Output strategy consulting firm.

In addition, it receives technical advice from the CTAE and cooperation from researchers with the Universidad Politecnica de Cataluña.

"The Google Lunar X PRIZE is a \$30 million international competition to safely land a robot on the surface of the Moon, travel 500 meters over the lunar surface, and send images and data back to the Earth. Teams must be at least 90 percent privately funded and must be registered to compete by December 31, 2010," according to the competition's Web site.

The lunar module designed by the Catalonia Moon Discovery Group, which is just a prototype, is a cone-shaped rover with six wheels equipped with photovoltaic cells that provide power to it and allow it to operate autonomously on the lunar surface.

Twenty-one other projects from all over the world have been presented in the competition, which ends in late 2014, but Fuentes said that this is the only one that is "entirely Catalanian and Spanish."

In their presentation in Barcelona, the people in charge of the project said that it has a budget of 50 million euros (\$61 million), of which 90 percent must come from the private sector.