

Liftoff for ESA’s ExoMars!



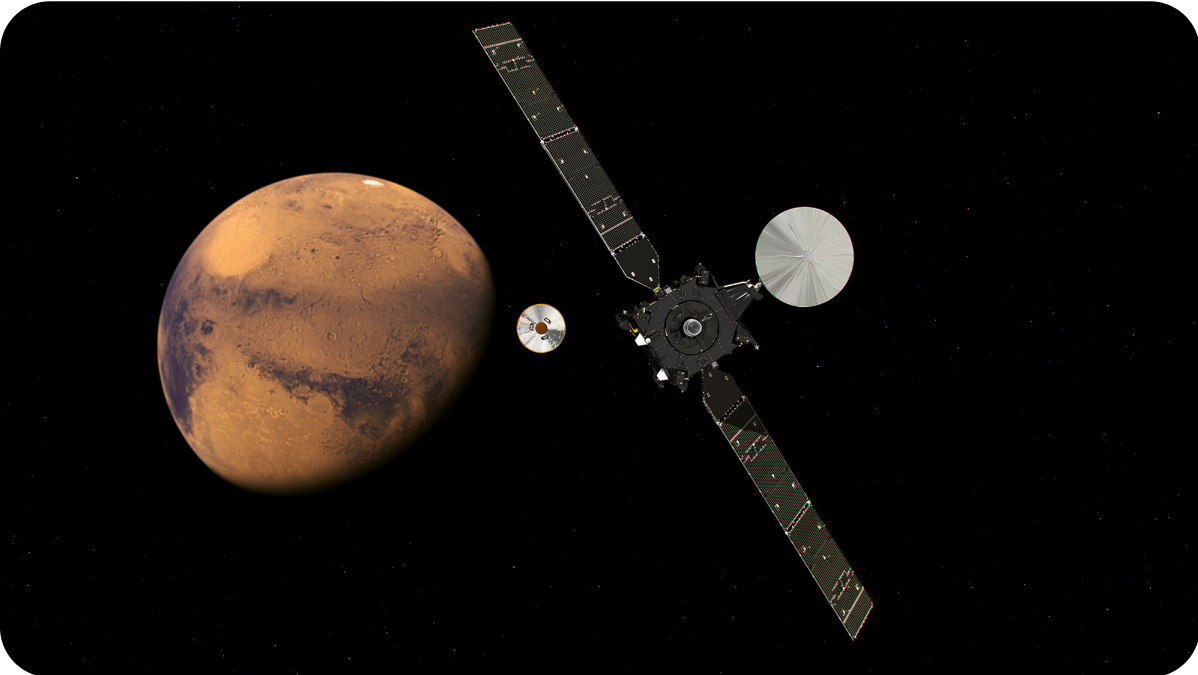
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15 March 2016

On Monday 14 March a huge Proton-M rocket blasted off from the Baikonur spaceport in Kazakhstan. Its mission: take two robotic probes into space, and onward to the planet Mars!

The probes are called the Trace Gas Orbiter and Schiaparelli. They are part of an ESA and Russian Federal Space Agency (Roscosmos) mission called ExoMars, which hopes to find simple forms of alien life – either alive or long extinct – on Mars.

Once in space, rockets were fired four times to nudge the probes into exactly the right position to take them onward to Mars. The probes then sent a signal to the Malindi ground tracking station in Africa, which relayed this to ESA’s control centre in Darmstadt, Germany. This signal was like the probes giving a big thumbs up, saying that everything had gone well and was functioning perfectly!



[Access the image](#)

The Trace Gas Orbiter and Schiaparelli will arrive at Mars in October, and then their mission of exploration can begin.

The successful lift-off is being celebrated by space scientists around the world. And there’s even more to come! In 2018 the second part of the ExoMars mission will launch, this time sending a high-tech rover to explore Mars and drill down beneath the surface to search for alien life. What do you think it will find?

Cool fact: The Trace Gas Orbiter’s solar panels have now unfolded and are powering the probes.

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