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Spain launches ESA Phi-LabNET in Barcelona to boost space innovation

ICFO will participate in the multidisciplinary consortium focused on space technologies and their application to boost climate resilience

The new centre will foster collaboration between academia, industry and investors to consolidate the country's space leadership

October 04, 2024

Phi-Lab NET Spain, a new infrastructure dedicated to boosting space innovation within the ScaleUp Programme of the European Space Agency (ESA), was presented this week in the framework of the NewSpace Economy Congress 2024 in Barcelona.

Following the ESA CM22 Ministerial Council meeting, 23 ESA Member and Associate States committed a total of 117.6 million euros to the ScaleUp programme and, thanks to the support of the Spanish Government, the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, through the Spanish Space Agency, has contributed 12 million euros to the programme, the Spanish Phi-Lab will have an annual co-financing model that with a 1.1 million euros provision for projects. This funding will foster collaboration between academia, research centres, industry and investment entities.

The launch of the **Phi-LabNET Spain in Barcelona**, which will form part of the Phi-Lab NET, represents a fundamental pillar of the ScaleUp Programme*, **an initiative designed to accelerate the commercialisation of space and foster the growth of private investment in the space sector.**

The **Phi-LabNET Spain in Barcelona** programme, **focused on space technologies and their application to boost climate resilience**, will have important co-funding from the consortium entities, whose main contribution comes from the Government of Catalonia, with more than 8 million euros, through the three entities that collaborate in the deployment of the NewSpace Strategy of Catalonia: the IEEC, the i2CAT Foundation and the Cartographic and Geological Institute of Catalonia (ICGC)

Mduan Carlos Cortes, Director of the Spanish Space Agency (AEE, by its acronym in Spanish) and Vice-President of the ESA Council; **Mr Luca del Monte**, Head of

Commercialisation Department at ESA; **Mr Josep Colome**, Director of the Area for the Promotion of the Space Sector of Catalonia at the IEEC; and **Mr Pol Gibert Horcas**, Secretary General of the Department of Business and Work of the Government of Catalonia participated in the presentation of Phi-LabNET Spain@Barcelona. All underlined the relevance of this new infrastructure for the national space ecosystem.

Phi-LabNET Spain will be located in the RDIT building of the 'Parc Mediterrani de la Tecnologia' in Castelldefels, Barcelona, where the IEEC and ESA-BIC Barcelona are also located, just beside ICFO's facilities. This new centre will be dedicated to support innovative and disruptive projects through calls for proposals led by the winning consortium, headed by the IEEC and composed of the i2CAT Foundation, the Cartographic and Geological Institute of Catalonia (ICGC), Fundacion General CSIC, Knowledge Innovation Market Foundation (KIM), ARRIBES Enlightenment, Universitat de Valencia (UVEG), Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC), Barcelona Supercomputing Centre (BSC-CNS), Ricardo Valle Institute of Innovation (IRV), ESA's MELiSSA Pilot Plant, located at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, and ICFO. The programme will support both academic entities and the state space industry.

The Spanish Phi-Lab is focused towards radical and complete innovation of the entrepreneurial ecosystem that the AEE has launched, together with the incubators and the technological broker. Due to its orientation, the Phi-Lab will transform the space ecosystem, feeding development projects with disruptive innovation, explained **Juan Carlos Cortes** during the presentation.

In line with this, **Pol Gibert Horcas** expressed the Government of Catalonia's view that we are facing a unique opportunity for companies and organisations in the sector to generate knowledge and innovation. The NewSpace Strategy of Catalonia, as a driver of new lines of activity in the sector, could not be more aligned with this commitment, which also opens the door to a powerful collaboration with the rest of the ecosystem of the Spanish territory.

The launch of the ESA Phi-Lab NET Spain is a milestone in the deployment of Phi-Lab NET, a network of 11 Phi-Labs under construction in ESA Member States. With this specific Phi-Lab, ESA underscores its commitment to leverage space assets addressing climate resilience and fostering a sustainable and innovative future, assured **Luca del Monte**. From a wider perspective, by bridging the gap between research and commercialisation, the ESA Phi-Lab NET, in collaboration with the ESA BICs and Technology Brokers, will inject disruptive innovation into startups, SMEs, and larger industries, enabling early identification of commercialisation opportunities and expediting market entry.

Josep Colome highlighted that It is an honour for the IEEC to make the Phi-LabNET Spain@Barcelona, a successful centre in promoting disruptive research for innovative projects. We count on a big team and an amazing consortium for this endeavour. And we also count on the collaboration of the teams at the Spanish Space Agency, the European Space Agency and the other members of the Phi-Lab NET, and the support of the Government

f Catalonia. He adds: Today we to contribute to the development of innovative spacetechnologies for climate resilience. start the mission With the mission to bring innovation and application together, a variety of services will be offered 'under one roof'. Phi-LabNET will open the way for pioneering ideas to reach the market, thus supporting Spain in its goal to become a European leader in space exploration and technology. Phi-LabNET Spain will offer, in addition to funding and a large knowledge network, IP management, technical support, access to infrastructure and business coaching. It will provide comprehensive support to all selected projects. Commenting on ICFO's involvement in that consortium, **Silvia Carrasco, director of Knowledge and Technology Transfer** at the institute asserted, The launch of Phi-LabNET Spain is a significant step forward for innovation in the space sector. At ICFO, we are thrilled to contribute our expertise in cutting-edge photonics and quantum technologies in collaboration with the broader space ecosystem represented in this admirable consortium. This partnership will drive transformative technologies, positioning Spain as a leader in space exploration, while accelerating the commercialization of space technologies and fostering the growth of private investment in the sector.

***About the ScaleUP programme**

The European Space Agency (ESA) ScaleUp programme is an initiative designed to accelerate the commercialisation of space and support the growth of private investment in space.

The ScaleUp programme consists of two elements that support a company throughout its life cycle. The first provides innovation boosting, business incubation, business acceleration, intellectual property and technology transfer services (**ScaleUp Innovate**), through instruments such as **ESA BIC**, **TECHNOLOGY BROKER** and **PHILAB**. The second element facilitates the expansion of products into new markets (**ScaleUp Invest**).

Within the Innovate element, Philab is focused on supporting innovative and disruptive space-related projects through calls led by a national manager selected by ESA.

Its role is to explore and select studies, provide industries and research teams with high-quality expertise and facilities, manage ESA's financial incentive scheme reserved for Philab and ensure that successful results reach the market and ESA programmes.