

Press release

Esrange celebrates 60 years: taking on growing role in Europe's space ambitions

Kiruna, 23 September 2026

As Europe accelerates efforts to strengthen independent, resilient, and responsive space capabilities, Esrange Space Center in northern Sweden marks its 60th anniversary. From its first sounding rocket launch in 1966 to the development of orbital launch capability from mainland Europe, Esrange has become a strategic space asset for Sweden, Europe, and international customers.

On Thursday, September 24, Esrange Space Center will celebrate six decades of space operations, science, and international collaboration. Owned and operated by SSC Space, the center has evolved from a European sounding rocket range into one of Europe's most comprehensive space centers, supporting scientific research, stratospheric balloon missions, satellite communications, rocket testing, reusable launcher demonstrations, and preparations for orbital launch operations.

Today, Esrange combines capabilities few places in Europe can offer in one location. Its Arctic position, vast impact and recovery area, long track record in science missions, and expanding launch infrastructure make it increasingly relevant at a time when access to space, security, resilience, and technological independence are high on the European agenda.

The story of Esrange began in the early 1960s, when the European Space Research Organization, the predecessor of the European Space Agency, identified northern Sweden as an ideal location for atmospheric and space research. Located above the Arctic Circle, in the auroral zone and surrounded by a sparsely populated recovery area, Esrange offered unique conditions for sounding rocket launches and scientific experiments. Construction began in 1964, and the first rocket was launched from Esrange on November 20, 1966. SSC Space took ownership of the range in 1972.

Since then, Esrange has served customers and researchers from Sweden, Europe, and around the world. More than 600 [sounding rockets](#) have been launched, supporting microgravity research, atmospheric studies, aurora science, and technology demonstrations. And the first [high-altitude balloon launch](#) in 1974 opened another important field of activity, enabling astronomy, climate research, and technology validation. Over the following decades, Esrange has also become a key hub in SSC Space's [global ground station network](#), supporting satellite and spacecraft missions across science, security, Earth observation, and exploration.

In recent years, Esrange has broadened its portfolio even further, establishing testbed facilities to support some of Europe's most ambitious rocket development programs – such as Isar Aerospace's [Spectrum rocket engine tests](#) leading up to their successful orbital launch recently, or the [Themis reusable launch vehicle demonstrations](#). And in 2028, SSC Space and Firefly Aerospace will begin [orbital launch operations](#) from the base, further strengthening Europe's launch capabilities.



“For 60 years, Esvinge has turned bold ideas into real missions – from scientific experiments above the Arctic Circle to technologies that are now shaping Europe’s future in space. What makes Esvinge unique is not only its heritage, but its growing strategic importance. As Europe strengthens its need for secure, resilient, and responsive space capabilities, Esvinge is ready to play an even greater role,” said Lennart Poromaa, Head of Esvinge Space Center, SSC Space.

Esvinge Space Center in brief

- Established in 1966 outside Kiruna, Sweden
- Owned and operated by SSC Space since 1972
- More than 600 sounding rockets and 700 high-altitude balloons launched
- Supports sounding rockets, stratospheric balloon missions, rocket testing, satellite communications, and scientific research
- Part of SSC Space’s global ground station network
- More than 40 antennas at the base which communicate daily with satellites in orbit
- Preparing for orbital launch operations from mainland Europe

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About SSC Space

SSC Space (formerly Swedish Space Corporation) is a leading global provider of advanced space services, with more than 50 years of experience. We help space organizations, research institutes, commercial and institutional actors from all over the world to get access to space. With local presence on all continents and about 750 committed employees, we offer specialist expertise in satellite communications and satellite control services, spacecraft operations, rocket and balloon systems, launch services and flight test services, as well as engineering, operations and consultancy services for space missions. We enable successful space projects within Earth observation, telecommunications, security, meteorology, navigation and positioning, scientific research and other applications. Among our strongest assets are Esvinge Space Center in northern Sweden, set out to be a leading provider of satellite launch services from mainland Europe, as well as one of the world’s largest commercial ground station networks for satellite communications. For more information, visit www.sscspace.com.