

PLANNING A MONTH-LONG PROGRAMME DEDICATED TO CARL SAGAN



During the visit of Professor Nigel Mason, former President of Europlanet, a molecular physicist and space scientist, to Serbia, a meeting was held at the Astronomical Observatory in Belgrade on 27 August 2026, at his initiative. The Observatory is also home to the Europlanet Hub, chaired by Dr. Ivana Milić Žitnik. Professor Mason, one of the founders of Europlanet and its former President, participated in the discussions on behalf of the organization.

In addition to Professor Mason, the meeting was attended by Prof. Dr Luka Č. Popović, Director of the Astronomical Observatory, Dr Milan Stojanović, Dr Milan M. Ćirković and Jovan Aleksić, representing the Astronomical Observatory, as well as Prof. Dr Anđelka Kovačević from the Faculty of Mathematics, University of Belgrade. The primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss the organization of activities in Serbia within the framework of an upcoming month-long event dedicated to the renowned popularizer of astronomy, entitled "A Month Dedicated to Carl Sagan". Other scientific topics of potential interest to the Astronomical Observatory were also discussed.

"A Month Dedicated to Carl Sagan" is a multi-institutional international initiative to be held from 20 November to 20 December 2026. Coordinated by the European Astrobiology Institute in close collaboration with Europlanet, the initiative will mark the 30th anniversary of Carl Sagan's passing. Its broader objective is to promote space sciences and strengthen Europe's role and visibility in the

field of space research.

During the meeting, the Astronomical Observatory confirmed its participation in the development and organisation of the Serbian programme within Carl Sagan Month. The programme will include public lectures at the Palace of Science and a dedicated Science Day focused on Serbian space-related research and opportunities for stronger participation in major European and international space-science programmes, including Artemis-related activities. An invitation to participate in the initiative has also been extended to the Institute of Physics Belgrade, with the aim of developing the programme as a broader collaborative initiative of the Serbian scientific community. Europlanet, through its regional hub, expressed its willingness to support the organization of such an event.

The timing of these activities is particularly appropriate following Serbia's signing of the Artemis Accords on 16 July 2026. The broader objective is therefore not only to commemorate Carl Sagan's scientific legacy, but also to strengthen connections between Serbian researchers, students, and institutions and the international scientific community through the Artemis programme, European research and innovation programmes, Europlanet, and international university partnerships.

Particular attention was given to identifying areas in which Serbia could make significant, visible, and collaborative contributions to international space research. Dr Milan Stojanović proposed that the Science Day should also include a dedicated session on Horizon Europe opportunities in space science, providing Serbian researchers with information on relevant calls, funding instruments and possibilities for participation in European collaborative projects.

The meeting also included a discussion on Serbia's previous participation in international projects, including Horizon programmes, telescope networks, OPTICON, and other collaborative initiatives. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of modern scientific databases, such as VAMDC and other research data infrastructures.