

# Soyuz spacecraft ends mission with smooth landing

Reuters

A Russian Soyuz capsule landed on the Kazakh steppes on Sunday, safely delivering a trio of astronauts who helped to dock the first privately owned spacecraft during a six-month stint on the International Space Station.

The descent capsule, carrying Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko, NASA astronaut Don Pettit and European Space Agency astronaut Andre Kuipers, touched down with its parachute in a cloud of dust at 0814 GMT.

The crew left the space station early on Sunday after serving 183 days in orbit, often sharing their experiences with the public via blogs and Twitter.

At the end of May, the crew released Space Exploration Technologies' unmanned Dragon cargo, which arrived as part of a test flight and was the first privately owned spaceship to reach the \$100 billion orbital outpost, which is a 15-nation project.

Three other ISS crew members - Russia's Gennady Padalka and Sergei Revin and NASA astronaut Joe Acaba - will remain in orbit.

Sunday Soyuz's landing took place two days after China's Shenzhou 9 spacecraft returned to Earth, ending a mission that put the country's first woman in space.

Although China is far from catching up with the United States and Russia, the Shenzhou 9 marked China's fourth manned space mission since 2003 and comes as budget restraints and shifting priorities have held back U.S. manned space launches.

Since the retirement of the space shuttles last year, the United States is dependent on Russia to fly astronauts to the International Space Station.

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