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Mankind always dreamed of overcoming gravitation and reaching other planets. But it was only in the 1960ies that this dream was to become reality.

On the 12th of April 1961 the spaceship "Vostok" was launched into space with a man on board and after orbiting our planet successfully returned to the Earth. The first man to overcome gravitation and orbit the Earth was Yuri Gagarin. This day went down in history of mankind as an outstanding achievement, opening the space era. In the course of space exploration there have been lots of achievements of world science and technology. This period saw the launching of many earth satellites, numerous space laboratories. Among the achievements we may enumerate the landing of automatic stations on the Moon, the flights of space laboratories towards the Venus and Mars.

These are the years of manned space flight programmes: Valentina Tereshkova was the first female cosmonaut to make a space flight, A. A. Leonov achieved the first "space walk" in 1965, the first Soviet experimental station with four cosmonauts on board went into orbit, the first American expedition landed on the Moon. The Soviet "Lunokhod", automatic orbital stations "Soyuz" and other space laboratories opened up a new period of space exploration. From the first experiments scientists went over to systematic exploration of space.

Recently there have been calls to reduce expenditure on space research programmes. I think it would be a serious mistake to allow this to happen. There is a direct link between the development of space research programmes and different earth technologies. The higher the former are the more developed the latter are.

The next great step will be when people land on our nearest planet Mars. Scientists say that the planet once had water on its surface. If that water is now frozen underground, humans will be able to use it someday. By the end of the 21-st century, scientists hope, it will be possible to "terraform" Mars — transform the planet into an earthlike place with air and water. Space awaits the 21st century's pioneers.