

The Year in Review



When I look back on 2004, it was a year that began with a certain degree of uncertainty in terms of unfinished business from the previous December's Council, which was reconvened on 4 February to address a number of unresolved issues concerning the Launcher Programme. At that meeting, however, the long-term future of Europe's guaranteed access to space was put on firm ground, with the approval of the Ariane-5 EGAS Programme and the Future Launcher Preparatory Programme. The launching of Soyuz vehicles from Kourou was also given the go-ahead at that same meeting.

The fact that the December 2003 Council was only completed in February meant that, exceptionally, the Council met five times in 2004, and there were important decisions to be taken on every occasion. In March, the Council approved the accession of two new Member States, Greece and Luxembourg, to the ESA Convention, as well as appointing the new team of Directors who will manage the Agency for the next four years. In June, it unanimously voted to unblock the remaining funds for the International Space Station Exploitation Programme. It also voted a Resolution providing guidelines for the important reform of the ESA financial and budgetary system as well as of the industrial procurement process, preparing the ground for the more efficient implementation of ESA programmes.

The meeting in December 2004 was equally crucial with the discussion, and submission for Member States' approval, of the Agency's budgets for 2005. At that last meeting of the year, Council adopted, almost all unanimously, the proposed Science budget, the General budget, the budgets for the Optional Programmes (52 in all, including that for the new Aurora Exploration Programme), and the budget for the Guiana Space Centre (CSG). Another important decision at the December Council was its approval of an agreement, again with unanimity, between ESA and Russia on long-term cooperation and partnership in the development and use of launchers. This endorsement, together with a bank loan to Arianespace guaranteed by the French Government, gave the green light for the associated industrial activities, with the first launch of Soyuz from Kourou now foreseen to take place at the end of 2007.

As noted by the ESA Council Chairman in his Foreword to this Report, there was also the historic first meeting of the 'Space Council' in Brussels on 25 November. As the first joint meeting of the European Union's Council and the ESA Council at Ministerial Level, it brought 28 Ministers together around the table to discuss 'space'.

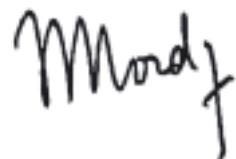
If the December Council brought to an end a very busy year in terms of political decision-making regarding future programmes, it was no less busy or eventful as far as the Agency's on-going programmes were concerned. It began with the launch of Rosetta by Ariane-5 on 2 March, followed by the flight of André Kuipers to the International Space Station in April, the arrival of Cassini-Huygens in orbit around Saturn in June, the launch of the second Double Star satellite in July, and the opening of the Columbus Control Centre in Oberpfaffenhofen in October. In November, we put our first satellite into orbit around the Moon, SMART-1, which also established a new world record in terms of fuel consumption with its electric-propulsion system consuming just 1 litre of xenon per 2 million kilometres.

The year also saw the entry into force of the Framework Agreement between ESA and the European Community, and the Czech Republic became the second ESA European Cooperating State after Hungary.

During the second half of the year, due to the Dutch Presidency of the European Union, ESA's political profile was raised considerably, with many important visitors to

ESTEC, including the Prime Ministers of Russia and China, and the Ambassadors of many European countries.

So it was definitely a very busy year, but I would certainly see it as a very successful one, due in no small part the dedication of the staff and their unstinting efforts, often under very challenging circumstances, on behalf of the organisation. This success is also a testimony to the virtue of the collective international endeavour that is ESA. Our continued success is also founded on an intense and regular dialogue with the Member State Delegations, with our counterparts in the European Union, and with the industrial, scientific and technological communities with whom we work throughout Europe. We look forward to working closely and constructively with all of them again in 2005 and for many years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dordain".

*Jean-Jacques Dordain
Director General, ESA*