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## Philae and Rosetta communicate for 20 minutes

**This confirmed link comes as excellent news in Philae's evolving mission, which is hotting up as comet Churyumov–Gerasimenko approaches perihelion (its closest point to the Sun, which it will reach on the night of 12 to 13 August). Various communication attempts between Rosetta and Philae have been made in the last few days. However, a stable link between the spacecraft and lander was established yesterday evening on the eighth attempt, running almost uninterrupted for 20 minutes — a real surprise for the teams, who are now analysing the data.**

ESA's Rosetta mission continues to make the news. Since the last contact between Philae and Rosetta on 24 June, the teams have been regularly attempting to establish communications between the spacecraft and the lander on the comet surface by varying Rosetta's height on Philae's horizon and varying the distance between the two craft. Yesterday, they established an eighth link, which was maintained almost uninterrupted for 20 minutes, from 19:45 to 20:05 CET.

As comet Churyumov–Gerasimenko approaches perihelion, its closest point to the Sun, all eyes are on this record-breaking mission. It will reach perihelion on 13 August. With the comet in close proximity to the Sun, scientists will be able to complete the analyses that were not possible in November due to Philae's rather "acrobatic" landing and final resting position, on its side and in the shadow of two rocky outcrops. But to do this, they must first re-establish a stable link between the Rosetta spacecraft and the Philae lander on the surface. This operation has been in progress since June.

Much to the surprise of the scientists involved, Rosetta and Philae "talked" to each other for 20 minutes via a virtually uninterrupted link established yesterday evening. This development is as promising as it is surprising, because such a link, achieved at a latitude of just 12 degrees, was not expected. This link is by far the best so far, with very few breaks in communication. It heralds positive prospects for the next phase of the mission, because such a high-quality communication link will enable the teams to regain control of Philae and uplink commands to it (until now, the lander has been waking up, working and going back to sleep entirely on its own). It also provides the science community with reassurance on the status of Philae and its instruments.

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