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CNES and Thales Alenia Space sign contract for SWOT mission's Poseidon altimeter

Tuesday 29 September at the Toulouse Space Centre (CST), CNES and Thales Alenia Space (TAS) signed the contract covering phase C/D of the Poseidon 3-C radar altimeter to be delivered for the Surface Water and Ocean Topography mission (SWOT).

This new contract follows the one signed in January for construction of the SWOT satellite, to be launched in 2020. It covers the supply of a Poseidon-3C nadir altimeter that will complement the main Ka-band Radar Interferometer instrument (KaRIn). This contract will receive funding under the PIA future investment programme.

SWOT (Surface Water and Ocean Topography) is a joint CNES-NASA mission to which the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) and UK Space Agency (UKSA) are also contributing. It is dedicated to measuring surface water levels in lakes and rivers and river discharges, and to acquiring highly precise and detailed data on ocean topography. It is designed around a key leap-ahead technology using wide-swath interferometry with the KaRIn instrument conceived by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), for which CNES and TAS are building the radiofrequency system. SWOT promises to revolutionize oceanography and land surface hydrology and is the latest in a long line of missions accomplished in partnership with NASA, beginning in 1992 with the launch of the TOPEX/Poseidon satellite and since continued through the series of Jason satellite missions.

Poseidon 3-C is the successor to the altimeters flying on the Jason satellites. Its role is to calibrate KaRIn's interferometric measurements for long-wavelength ocean signals (typically more than 1,000 kilometres). With this altimeter, SWOT is set to make a major contribution to the constellation of satellite altimetry missions delivering data to scientists and for many applications used by citizens in their daily lives.

After the signature of this new contract benefitting France's industry, the CST's Director Marc Pircher commented: "I am pleased with this new contract signed by CNES and TAS, one of our historic partners. The SWOT mission will enable us to acquire more-precise data with better resolution than ever before, thanks to its new-generation instruments, offering a new tool for monitoring the environment and the effects of global warming."

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