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France-Sweden space cooperation CNES at 50th anniversary of Esrange Space Centre

This weekend, CNES took part in celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the Esrange Space Centre in Kiruna, Sweden. On this occasion, the Swedish Space Corporation (SSC), which operates the centre, had invited many space dignitaries and CNES was represented by Jean-Pascal Le Franc, Deputy Director of Planning and International Relations.

This year the Esrange Space Centre in Kiruna, northern Sweden, is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its first sounding rocket launch, since when it has worked continually for the international space community, launching more than 550 rockets and 520 balloons in total. The base is also the site of one of the most important satellite control centres in the world.

France and Sweden have developed fruitful cooperation in stratospheric ballooning over the last 40 years. The first balloon launch campaign conducted by CNES out of Esrange in the 1990s was dedicated to studying the aurora borealis. Through their collaboration, CNES and SSC have acquired the technical expertise to launch balloons of all sizes from high latitudes for the French and European scientific community.

To mark the event, CNES was in Esrange on 22 October at the invitation of SSC, where it was represented by Jean-Pascal Le Franc who spoke about growing demand and new solutions in the domain of sounding rockets and stratospheric balloons at a roundtable session on the benefits of space on Earth. After paying tribute to the Esrange Space Centre and Sweden's space sector in general, he pointed to possible future CNES balloon launch campaigns in Sweden and to the HEMERA project, through which CNES and its partners—notably Sweden, Germany, Italy, Norway and the United Kingdom—are looking to establish an innovative European balloon R&T platform under the Horizon 2020 programme.

After the event, Jean-Pascal Le Franc commented: "The Esrange Space Centre's great heritage and accomplishments are the clearest illustrations of the Swedish space sector's amazing precocity and dynamism. For CNES, cooperation with Sweden has always gone hand in hand with innovation and success, and its future is assured, both through our agency's balloon campaigns and through the Horizon 2020 programme with our European partners."

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