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European space policy ESA Director General Jan Wörner visits Toulouse Space Centre

Thursday 18 May, ESA Director General Jan Wörner visited the Toulouse Space Centre, one of the four centres of excellence of CNES, the chief contributor to ESA. He was welcomed by CNES President and ESA Council co-Chair Jean-Yves Le Gall. This visit underlined the ESA Director General's interest in the advances that CNES is achieving to curb climate change and in Mars exploration.

New players are regularly emerging in space but none can boast as broad and solid a footing as the European Space Agency (ESA) with its 22 member states, of which France is the chief contributor.

It is in this context that Jan Wörner was at the Toulouse Space Centre yesterday to see close up how the French-German MERLIN satellite (Methane Remote Sensing Lidar Mission) will be spearheading efforts to curb climate change. Scheduled to launch in 2021, MERLIN will precisely measure quantities of atmospheric methane to determine its natural and anthropogenic sources. For this project, CNES is providing a new version of the Myriade Evolutions spacecraft bus and will be responsible for the satellite control centre and data distribution ground segment.

Jan Wörner visited the French Instruments Mars Operations Centre (FIMOC) where daily operations for ChemCam and SAM, the two French instruments on the U.S. Curiosity rover trekking across unexplored Martian territory, are planned. He was also given a presentation of CNES's future Mars projects, notably its contribution to the InSight mission that will depart in 2018 to "listen to Mars' beating heart", and to Mars 2020, which will be carrying a significantly enhanced version of ChemCam called SuperCam.

The visit concluded with a tour of the CADMOS centre for the development of microgravity applications and space operations that prepares, organizes and monitors experiments in microgravity, notably those currently being performed by Thomas Pesquet on the International Space Station. These experiments are designed to observe physical and physiological phenomena that would otherwise be masked by gravity on the ground. CADMOS is the only control centre in the world with a laboratory for preparing microgravity experiments, with the ability to define them and get them running in space within a short timeframe.

Contacts

Fabienne Lissak - Head of Media
Pascale Bresson - Press Officer

Tel. +33 (0)1 44 76 78 37
Tel. +33 (0)1 44 76 75 39

fabienne.lissak@cnes.fr
pascale.bresson@cnes.fr