

SPATIAL and POLARIS platforms opened at the LAM astrophysics laboratory

Friday 19 September, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall opened the new SPATIAL and POLARIS platforms at the LAM astrophysics laboratory in Marseille, putting the final seal on an ambitious operation to relocate the city's astrophysics teams to the Château-Gombert high-tech cluster begun 10 years ago and which today is a huge success.

On the occasion of this major event for Marseille, CNES's President reminded the audience that "CNES and space laboratories have a long shared history of fantastic scientific successes dating back to the agency's inception at the start of the 1960s. This partnership between research laboratories, the national scientific research centre CNRS, academia and CNES has yielded some impressive results. CNES will continue to give them its unstinting support, as there can be no space science projects without the teamwork of all these experienced and inventive researchers, technicians and engineers."

The opening of these two platforms puts LAM among Europe's leading laboratories, giving it the capability to build, test and qualify instruments for the largest space- and ground-based astrophysics research infrastructures.

The SPATIAL platform consists of a suite of space environment test and qualification facilities, including the large 90-cubic-metre ERIOS¹ calibration and integration chamber for optical space instruments that will be used to characterize the Near-Infrared Spectrometer and Photometer (NISP) for the Euclid mission, part of the European Space Agency's Cosmic Vision programme. The POLARIS platform (POLishing Active and Robotic Integrated System) is a key facility that will serve to polish large-diameter optical parts.

CoRoT, the exoplanet hunter that has returned such extraordinary results, Herschel, for which LAM demonstrated the full range of its expertise in optics and mechanical engineering, and Rosetta with its increasingly spectacular pictures of comet Churyumov-Gerasimenko are among the flagship achievements of LAM, not forgetting the much-anticipated upcoming landing of Philae on the comet's nucleus in November.

In conclusion, Jean-Yves Le Gall underlined that "while most of the funding for the facilities we are opening today came from CNES, contributions were also provided by CNRS/INSU, Aix-Marseille University, the OCEVU laboratory of excellence and European funds. I would therefore like to sincerely thank all of these stakeholders for enabling such a remarkable convergence of efforts and energies to create these technology platforms at LAM."

1 Étalonnage, Réglage et Intégration pour l'Optique Spatiale