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France and Italy set to step up space cooperation

Friday 6 February, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall was in Rome where he co-chaired a seminar with Roberto Battiston, President of ASI, the Italian space agency. The two agency heads took this opportunity to review bilateral French-Italian space cooperation and discuss possible avenues for consolidating it in the wake of the ESA Ministerial Conference in Luxembourg.

French-Italian space cooperation was put on a formal footing in 2007 and is strongly focused on Earth observation, with the COSMO-SkyMed and Pleiades programmes, and on telecommunications with the Athena-Fidus and SICRAL 2 satellites, the former launched in 2014 and the latter scheduled for launch this April by Ariane 5. In Europe, CNES and ASI have long worked on the Copernicus and Galileo programmes and more recently signed a cooperation agreement on the instruments for the BepiColombo science probe that ESA is sending to Mercury in three years' time. Lastly, France and Italy are also working together on the Vega launcher, which has already logged three successful flights and is next set to launch on 11 February.

The launches of Athena-Fidus and SICRAL 2 close out the last remaining big cooperation programmes between the two nations. A CNES/ASI seminar was therefore held today in Rome to identify areas for renewed French-Italian space cooperation, which will be set out in a letter of intent signed by the two agencies.

After his visit, Jean-Yves Le Gall commented: "This seminar that I had the pleasure of co-chairing with Roberto Battiston was very positive, laying the foundations for increased cooperation between France and Italy in space. The close ties between our two nations were cemented at the ESA Ministerial Conference in Luxembourg, where there was a total convergence of views. The letter of intent that we are preparing will seal our joint commitment to step up the longstanding collaboration that has already achieved major successes."

Contacts

Pascale Bresson
Alain Delrieu
Julien Watelet

Tel. +33 (0)1 44 76 75 39
Tel. +33 (0)1 44 76 74 04
Tel. +33 (0)1 44 76 78 37

pascale.bresson@cnes.fr
alain.delrieu@cnes.fr
julien.watelet@cnes.fr

cnes.fr/presse