

Foreword

However one looks at it, 2003 was an exceptional year for ESA. The failure of Ariane-5 in December 2002 and the tragic 'Columbia' accident on 1 February 2003 and their implications for the Agency's activities posed major challenges for Europe's space programme. The Agency had to work harder than ever to keep its programmes on track. Both the Executive and the Delegations made an enormous effort in this respect. The Member States made several sacrifices in order to help ESA cope with the difficult situation. For the Ariane programme, for example, there was a need to have an extra meeting of Council at Ministerial Level to take a series of decisions that will reshape the European launcher sector and secure Europe's access to space with a competitive launcher system. The attention of the Agency and its Council has been very much focussed on these programmes.

Let us not forget that a lot of other things also happened in ESA in 2003. One very clear success was that in navigation, with the Galileo Programme now up and running after a long period of preparation, and with the first test satellites planned to be launched in 2005. In the Science Programme, the postponement of the launch of Rosetta caused some turbulence, but the launch of Europe's first mission to the Moon, SMART-1, went very well. Europe also launched its first mission to Mars, Mars Express, on 2 June from Baikonur.

2003 was also a year of rapid evolution in the European space sector, particularly in terms of closer cooperation between ESA and the European Union (EU). The publication of the European Commission's White Paper on space policy was an important step in this domain. In addition, the new agreement between the Agency and the EU, which was signed in November, provides a framework for expanded cooperation between the two institutions. It is vital for ESA's future to have reliable and fruitful cooperation with the EU and the Commission.

In Earth Observation, international interest increased considerably, as evidenced first after the Johannesburg summit in September 2002 and later at the Earth Observation Summit in Washington in July 2003, and by the work of the ad hoc Group on Earth Observation (GEO). Europe has an important role to play in this evolution by supporting this growth in interest with the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) programme, a joint ESA/EU initiative which, after a long definition phase, was put on a more solid basis during 2003.



Another important event for the Agency was the change of Director General. I would like to take the opportunity here to thank Antonio Rodotà once again for the excellent work he has carried out during his six years at the helm. I also want to welcome his successor, Jean-Jacques Dordain, who has already worked in ESA for many years and therefore knows it extremely well. The challenges that he and his team face are tremendous, and he has already set out his programme for meeting many of them in 'Agenda 2007', which includes a substantial reorganisation of the Agency.

Let me end by thanking the Executive and the Delegations for all of their efforts during the year, which ended for ESA with a much more optimistic mood than it started.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Per Tegnér'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Per Tegnér
Chairman of Council