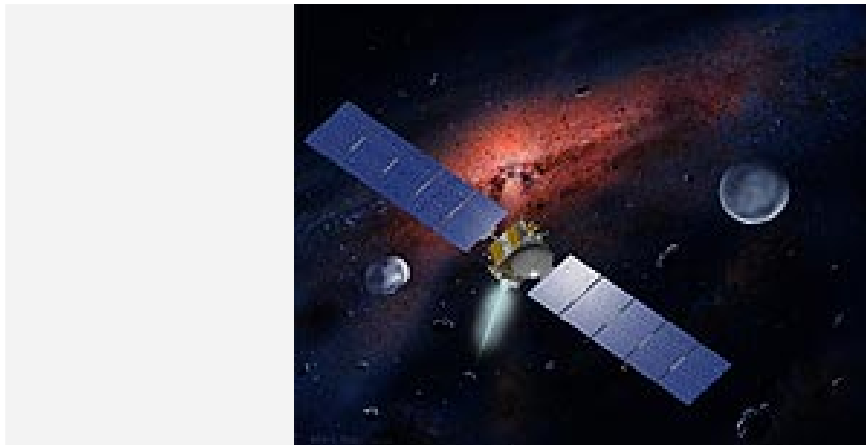

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DLR welcomes the reinstatement of NASA's Dawn mission

28 March 2006



The Dawn probe

NASA has announced that it has decided to go ahead with the Dawn mission, a robotic exploration of two major asteroids. The main payload of the probe consists of European technology.

"With the renewed commitment to Dawn by NASA, new opportunities for European planetary research are reinstated on an asteroid mission which had been cancelled because of technical problems and cost overruns. I am particularly happy with this decision, since Dawn is the first American mission to have two European experiments at its heart", said Professor Dr Sigmar Wittig, chairman of the executive board of DLR.

Wittig added: "The camera technology, which has already proven itself on the ESA Mars Express mission, was developed in Germany. This technology will supply the very first pictures from close proximity to an asteroid".

The Dawn probe is part of NASA's 'Discovery' programme. Using a newly-developed 'ion drive', the probe will first travel to an asteroid called Vesta.

After a year's investigation of Vesta, Dawn is to fly onwards to another object between Mars and Jupiter: Ceres, another asteroid. With a diameter of approximately 950 kilometres, Ceres is one of the largest objects in this region of our Solar System. The probe will get there in the year 2015.

This mission is of particular interest to planetary research, since asteroids contain the material from which the entire Solar System and indeed Earth developed. Both Ceres and Vesta can be classified as 'proto planets' - Ceres is an icy world and Vesta has primitive vulcanism.

Discoveries by this mission may supply a key to the further understanding of our existence and possibly the origins of the Solar System itself.

Related Contacts

Andreas Schütz

Communication Department

Tel: +49 30 67055-130

Mobile: +49 171 3126466

Fax: +49 30 67055-151
E-Mail: Andreas.Schuetz@dlr.de

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