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German ESA Astronaut Hans Schlegel chosen for the European Columbus mission to the ISS

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ESA, NASA and the German Aerospace Center (DLR) announced today that German astronaut Hans Schlegel has been named to fly on the Space Shuttle mission that will deliver the European Columbus research laboratory to the International Space Station (ISS) in September 2007.

"We have been working towards this goal for a long time." said Professor Sigmar Wittig, Chairman of the Board of DLR. "Alongside the long-term mission of astronaut Thomas Reiter, this is an important German contribution towards research into weightlessness". NASA chief Michael Griffin had personally communicated the message of Schlegel's nomination to Professor Wittig, who added: "We are delighted with this news and are grateful to our partners that a German astronaut will accompany the Columbus research lab to the ISS."



German ESA Astronaut Hans Schlegel

"Germany is the prime contractor for Columbus, the first European laboratory devoted to long-term research in space. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel was present in Bremen when the laboratory set off on its trip to the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Germany contributed approximately 41 per cent of development costs of the European part of the ISS and is thus an important and essential partner in the International Space Station project", added Wittig.

On the mission aboard Space Shuttle "Discovery" (STS-122), Hans Schlegel will be taking on a key role: he will be involved in the installation, fitting-out and initial commissioning of the Columbus laboratory. Schlegel, a member of the European Astronaut Corps since 1998, was previously a DLR astronaut in 1993 for two weeks on the Spacelab D-2-Mission (STS-55).

Beside Hans Schlegel, veteran NASA space flier Navy Cmdr. Stephen Frick will command the STS-122 mission, while Navy Cmdr. Alan Poindexter will serve as pilot. Mission Specialists include Air Force Col. Rex Walheim, Stanley Love and Leland Melvin. For Poindexter, Love and Melvin, this will be their first spaceflight.

Preparation for the Columbus Laboratory

The Columbus module is Europe's most important contribution to the ISS. To support it, DLR's Oberpfaffenhofen-based Columbus Control Centre was established. The Control Centre is already supporting Thomas Reiter's ongoing mission to the ISS. The ultramodern facility is in permanent contact with astronauts on the Space Station. Once Columbus is attached to the Station, it will be responsible for the control and operation of the European laboratory. The Centre will also coordinate European experiment operations.



Space laboratory Columbus in the Integration Hall of EADS SPACE Transportation in Bremen

Columbus will be transported to the Station in the cargo bay of the Shuttle together with five internal rack facilities (Biolab, the Fluid Science Laboratory, the European Physiology Modules facility, the European Drawer Rack and the European Transport Carrier).

The two external experiment facilities for Columbus (EuTEF and SOLAR) will also be travelling separately in the cargo bay and will be attached onto the outside of the laboratory module structure during Schlegel's flight.

Following the launch of the mission from the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral in Florida, the Shuttle will take two days to rendezvous and dock with the ISS. Columbus will be lifted out of the Shuttle's cargo bay by Canada's Space Station robotic arm (Canadarm 2) and placed in position on the starboard side docking port of the European-developed Node 2 on flight day four. Once attached to the ISS, and following power-up of the module, the Columbus payload rack facilities will be moved from their launch configuration to their operational locations in the module.

Three spacewalks (extra-vehicular activities) are scheduled during this mission. The first will help to install and power-up Columbus. A second EVA will serve to install the external payloads. The payload rack facilities will also be checked out. The third EVA will serve to install a nitrogen tank assembly on the Station, a task not directly related to the Columbus part of the mission. Final commissioning of the laboratory and its initial scientific experiments will take place during the weeks following the end of the Shuttle mission and will be carried out by the resident ISS crew.

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