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NASA Chief Michael Griffin visits DLR Oberpfaffenhofen

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Oberpfaffenhofen - Just a few days after the successful mission of the space shuttle Discovery, the Chairman of the German Aerospace Center (DLR), Prof. Dr Sigmar Wittig, welcomed NASA Administrator Dr Michael Griffin to the DLR facility in Oberpfaffenhofen near Munich. On 20 and 21 July, Wittig introduced several DLR institutes to the NASA chief and the two heads discussed areas for potential future cooperation.

The visit focussed on demonstrating the latest DLR technologies in space robotics, Mars digital imagery, atmospheric re-entry, laser communication and radar remote sensing. DLR globally holds a leading position in these fields. DLR scientists also discussed with Griffin the use of these technologies in future space exploration programmes, particularly in Moon and Mars projects.

During a visit to the German Space Operations Center (GSOC), Wittig explained to his American guest details of space missions that DLR is currently operating. At present, the Astrolab mission, Europe's first long-duration mission on the International Space Station (ISS), is at the centre of activity. ESA (European Space Agency) astronaut Thomas Reiter, from Germany, is conducting numerous scientific experiments as part of the Astrolab mission during his six-month stay onboard the ISS.

Wittig thanked the NASA administrator for his support in the recent selection of the next German ESA astronaut, Hans Schlegel. He will be onboard shuttle mission STS-122, in September 2007, which will carry the European research module Columbus into space for mating with the ISS. Chairman Wittig congratulated Griffin on the successful second Shuttle return-to-flight mission, saying: "We look forward to the continuation of ISS assembly and utilisation. The launch of Columbus next year will be a significant step forward in our microgravity research as well as for the research operations here in the German Space Operations Center." NASA Administrator Griffin underlined the importance of the ISS for international cooperation in space: "We consider the ISS a significant test bed for future programs such as the exploration of Moon and Mars, which we wish to jointly undertake with our international partners."

Related Contacts

Marc J. Haese

German Aerospace Center (DLR)

Corporate Development and External Relations, International Cooperation

Tel: +49 2203 601-2177

Fax: +49 2203 601-3907

E-Mail: marc.haese@dlr.de

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