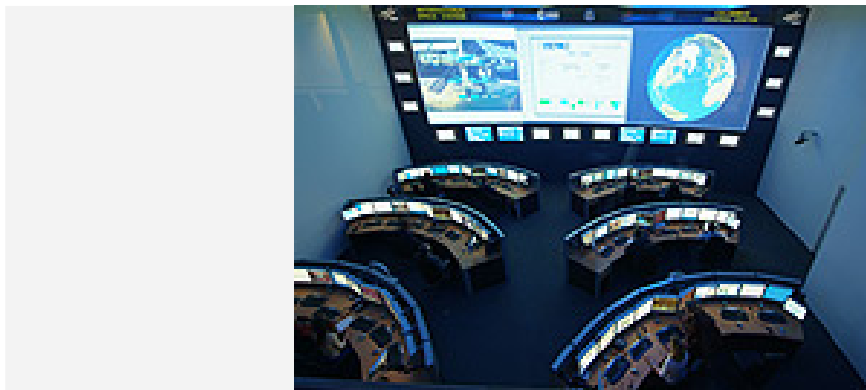

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Oberpfaffenhofen ready for Columbus

6 December 2006

Independent review of DLR's control centre: Mission teams are right on schedule



Columbus Control Center at DLR in Oberpfaffenhofen

The Columbus Control Center, based at DLR Oberpfaffenhofen is fully prepared for the flight, docking and operation of the European space lab Columbus. That was the conclusion of the Flight Operations Readiness Review (FORR) carried out at Oberpfaffenhofen on 4/5 December 2006. High-ranking experts from NASA, ESA, Astrium and DLR reviewed the state of preparation of the mission teams and ground equipment.

The teams at Oberpfaffenhofen have been preparing for Shuttle mission 1E (STS-122) since 2002. This mission will transport the space lab to the International Space Station (ISS), where it will dock. The FORR is carried out around twelve months prior to the scheduled launch date. The review involves checking whether the control centres and their personnel are fully capable of managing the mission. The Columbus module's flight and docking process have been simulated many times in the past few years in the control centres at Oberpfaffenhofen and Houston. The simulations also included potential problems that the ground teams might have to deal with during the mission.



Participants in the Flight Operations Readiness Review (FORR)

During the FORR, the teams then had to demonstrate their state of readiness and their plans for the next twelve months. The review revealed that preparations are right on schedule and the remaining tasks can be accomplished within the remaining time available before the launch. "We are well prepared for the launch of the Columbus module on the Space Shuttle Discovery next year and we are looking forward to a successful mission STS-122," says Thomas Kuch, head of Mission Operations at the Oberpfaffenhofen control centre.

The FORR conducted for Columbus was the fourth to be carried out in the space station programme. NASA performs the reviews in order to check the state of readiness of its international partners in joint missions. FORRs have already been carried out for the Russian ISS modules 'Zarya' and 'Zvezda'. In 1998, 'Zarya' became the first ISS module to go into orbit. 'Zvezda' has been in orbit since the year 2000, where it serves as living quarters and a control room for the Russian part of the ISS. The third FORR was carried out on the European mission control team for the Automated Transfer Vehicle (ATV), an unmanned supply ship which is scheduled to make its first journey to the ISS in the summer of 2007.

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