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**Crossing the borders - Interview with Prof. Johann-Dietrich Wörner**

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*In an interview conducted as 2007 draws to its close, Chairman of the DLR Executive Board, Prof. Johann-Dietrich Wörner discusses his first ten months in the job, his vision of the future, appreciation of the past and the prospects for research within aviation, space travel, energy and traffic.*

**Professor Wörner, this year the German Aerospace Center (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt; DLR) has been celebrating 100 years of German aerospace research. What have been DLR's main achievements during the past century?**

**Wörner:** The answer to that question is straightforward and quite simple: DLR's most important achievement lies in the fact of its very existence. Or, to be precise: The fact that for a century now, an aeronautics and astronautics facility (astronautics has been around since the 1920s) has existed in and for Germany, forming an institutional link between research conducted by universities, government research, and research conducted by a major research facility.

Where else in the world can you find such a long tradition of this? And not only has it endured in Germany for a century already: German aerospace research has also taken place in the context of no less than five different forms of government. From the German Empire, via the Weimar Republic and two dictatorships, to the reunified Federal Republic - that also represents the democratisation of research.



Executive Board Chairman Wörner

Of course you would probably like me to name some specific highlights. But it is in the small things that our greatness lies. It is only by valuing research on the smallest scale, that of each individual researcher, that DLR and its predecessors were and are able to create great things.

To put it succinctly: We are great in small things, and for us, greatness can be very small. If you'll allow me to put my opening thought more succinctly as well: Our achievement is progress. For us, progress is a tradition, and has been for more than a hundred years already. I promise you that, in this way at least, we shall remain very "traditional"

**On 10 January 2008, Space Shuttle Atlantis will deliver the European research module Columbus to the International Space Station (ISS). Could you tell us what is special about Columbus?**

**Wörner:** Its name, "Columbus". This name already says it all. Columbus crosses boundaries, just like Christopher Columbus did. Some of these boundaries are visible. The laboratory simply transcends these. No customs officer or border barrier can stop Columbus and the ISS.

Other boundaries are invisible. They are the boundaries of our knowledge. We do not know yet, which discoveries our research with Columbus will bring us. But we do know for certain that we will make new discoveries. Perhaps we may think that we are sailing to India, while we actually end up discovering America...

To put it concretely: The European Space Laboratory allows research in weightlessness to be carried out at the highest level. On board the ISS, conditions obtain which cannot be created on Earth. This provides opportunities for research - in fields ranging from Materials Research to Life Sciences to basic research. Germany's contribution to the project puts us not just in a prominent, but in fact in a leading position in Europe!



Johann-Dietrich Wörner: "Progress has been our formula for success"

**You took over as Chairman of the DLR Executive Board ten months ago. What does the future hold for DLR?**

**Wörner:** According to a well-known dictum, without the past the present has no future. My recipe is straightforward: "Take the following ingredients"

From the past: the outstanding employees, excellent research and development, the best national and international networks, as well as a good pinch of individuality in research - with these, DLR will be very well equipped for the next 100 years. At least for the next 100 years, I should say.

For the future: The Senate has commissioned me to swiftly draw up proposals for a new structure of the DLR. During my first months in office, we have developed these together. At the annual general meeting of 2007, these proposals for a reorientation and further development of the structure and partly also of the objectives of DLR were accepted. I call this fine-tuning of that which already exists, geared to the demands of the present and aimed at enabling us to face those of the future.

If you'll allow me to use a figurative analogy: The first Boeing 747 took to the skies in 1969. To this day, 747 planes still fly the skies. It's just that, as far as the technology is concerned, they are not identical to the archetype anymore. And in the meantime, Airbus has come on to the scene.

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