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UTILISATION OF THE COLUMBUS LABORATORY BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

Abstract

The European Columbus Laboratory, developed by the European Space Agency, was permanently attached to the International Space Station (ISS) in February 2008 and it is expected to be utilised at least up to 2020, with a final confirmation expected from the International Partners by 2010 in the context of deciding upon the overall continuation of the ISS. Additionally, the availability of open, competitive and quality-based access to pan-European global research infrastructures is becoming increasingly important at the level of the European Union in the frame of the European Research Area. The European Space Council and the European Parliament have advocated a strong synergy between the European Union Framework Programme and the European Space Agency (ESA) activities.

The European Union has recently expressed a strong interest in participating in the Human Spaceflight activities and the involvement in the International Space Station Programme is the first concrete step in this direction.

In this context, ESA has conducted an assessment to define an initial phase of utilisation of Columbus by the European Union within the Framework Programme 7.

The paper shall present the main results of the assessment and the perspectives that can be opened to European Scientists and Industry by making the Columbus Laboratory a European Research Infrastructure exploited by all European Union Member States.