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DAVID – EARLY 1990S ISRAELI EARTH OBSERVATION SATELLITE PROJECT

Abstract

The paper will shed light on an obscured Israeli space project of the early 1990's, that never made it into space. DAVID satellite project was a cooperation between Israel's ELOP company (Today part of Elbit Systems, the manufacturer of space cameras for all Israeli satellites) and the German company OHB.

The DAVID program was the first Israeli attempt to use a specially developed multi spectral camera - to be provided by ELOP, on a small satellite provided by German partner OHB. The Israeli Space Agency was deeply involved in the project, which was supposed to be co-funded by the European Community.

The paper will describe the Israeli payload- MSRS: Multi Spectral High-Resolution System, an innovative (at the time of development almost revolutionary) camera with twelve multispectral bands at the near Infrared spectral region. The satellite was supposed to monitor the Earth from a low orbit, mainly for environmental purposes such as agriculture, vegetation, forestry and Earth resources applications. After some year of development, and completion of a series of successful trials on the payload (which was installed on an aircraft) the program came to a stop – mainly due to budgetary issues.

It is interesting to note, that decades after the project was terminated such a satellite WAS built and launch on another collaborations – the VENUS satellite, a joint French Israeli project. The paper will use original archival materials from Israel and Germany, as well as testimonies and recollections of prominent ELOP engineers and the director of Israel Space Agency at the time.