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THE ORIGINS OF THE ASTRONAUT PROGRAM IN ISRAEL: PREPARING FOR THE
SPACEFLIGHT - 1999-2001

Abstract

The paper is the third in a series of essays which portray the origins of the first Israeli astronaut project – that culminated in the spaceflight of astronaut colonel Ilan Ramon, on the space shuttle Columbia on the STS-107 mission, that ended in tragedy just minutes before landing on February 1st, 2003. The series of papers on the Israeli astronaut project is an initiative of the history committee of the International Academy of Astronautics.

The paper will cover the period of 1999-2001, in which Ilan Ramon was preparing for his mission at the Johnson Spaceflight Center in Houston, and the scientific experiment he was responsible for (MEIDEX) was taking shape, both in Israel and in the USA.

Recently released documents of the ministry of science and technology will be included to further understand the political aspect of the mission, that was originally scheduled for 2001. As in previous papers of the series, original documents (many of which are handwritten) of Ilan Ramon will give another, somewhat personal account of the events researched.