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Telespazio (Finmeccanica/Thales) and MARS Center take part in scientific experiments on board the International Space Station

Through its subsidiary MARS Center (*Microgravity Advanced Research and Support Center*) Telespazio, a Finmeccanica/Thales company, is set to take part in scientific experiments to be conducted on board the International Space Station (ISS).

NASA's Space Shuttle Atlantis, after been postponed twice in December, will set off on mission STS-122, on 7 February 2008 at 9.45 pm Italian time. The main goal of the mission will be to install the Columbus module, built in Italy by Thales Alenia Space, on the International Space Station.

The Naples-based MARS Center, which is 100% controlled by Telespazio, was given the role of Facility Responsible Center (FRC) by the European Space Agency (ESA) for the *Fluid Science Laboratory* that will operate in the Columbus module. The laboratory will conduct experiments into the behaviour of fluids in microgravity. The experiments will be carried out both by the astronauts on board the ISS, and by MARS operators via commands sent from the control room in Naples.

The MARS Center will be responsible for running the Fluid Science Laboratory during operations on board the ISS, and will be required to co-ordinate all the pre-mission activities, prepare the experiments and promote the scientific use of the facility itself to potential customers. The MARS Center will be actively involved in Geoflow, the first experiment to be carried out inside the Columbus module, which will simulate the geophysical characteristics of the Earth's liquid core. The aim is to gain a better understanding of the phenomena generated by the earth's magnetic field.

In its role as Facility Responsible Center, MARS is part of a European network that connects all the ground centres supporting Columbus' operations. The MARS Center is one of only four centres to be given operating responsibility by the ESA for the Columbus laboratories.

The MARS Center supported the Italian Space Agency (ASI) during the recent Esperia mission, overseeing the integration of the experimental payloads used by the astronaut Paolo Nespoli and developing the website. In addition, the MARS Center is one of the USOC (*User Support and Operations Centres*) for the ALTEA experiment, conducted in 1997, and the MDS experiment, which will take place on board the ISS in 2008.

The MARS (Microgravity Advanced Research and Support Center), created in 1988, is Italy's first research centre in the field of fluid physics and support for microgravity experiments. Since June 2005, MARS has been 100% controlled by Telespazio (Finmeccanica/Thales). Over the years, the MARS Center has gained a significant body of expertise, transforming itself from a research centre into a hub for the development of leading-edge technology, with the aim of becoming an international benchmark in the aerospace sector. For further information, visit www.marscenter.it

Telespazio, a joint venture between Finmeccanica (67%) and Thales (33%), is a world leader in satellite services: from management of satellites to Earth observation services, from satellite navigation to broadband multimedia telecommunications. Telespazio plays a leading role in the reference markets harnessing technological experience acquired over the years and through its participation in major European space programs such as: GALILEO, EGNOS, GMES and COSMO-SkyMed.

