

Europe in Space

On 12 May 1989 the European Space Agency (ESA) headquartered in Paris, France signed a deposit contract with the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy. Under this agreement ESA transfers its documentary material to the Historical Archives of the European Communities (HAEC) located at Villa Il Poggiolo. It is at HAEC that a team of historians affiliated with the EUI chronicle the history of ESA as files become available to the public. Under the terms of this agreement files may be opened after a period of 15 years. Successive riders to this arrangement, however, have declared that documents that relate to single projects which ESA defines as terminated can be released to the HAEC sooner. The definition of terminated, in this context, means that first set-up and launch have been successfully completed; even if new launches of the prototype are still in progress. An example of a terminated project according to this definition would be the joint ESA and NASA Giotto project, 1986. Giotto-related files are considered accessible, thus allowing for the HAEC to make a special appraisal and order related documents with the consent of ESA.

The archival arrangement of the HAEC was patterned on the historical evolution of the European Space Agency itself. In 1960, a group of senior European scientists launched the idea of a special European Community for space studies. On 1 November of that year an intergovernmental conference held in Meyrin, Switzerland, composed a draft agreement which led to the formation of a Preparatory Commission for Space Research (COPERS, in French acronym) in February 1961. The governing body of this temporary organization was a council composed of delegates from the member nations, namely Belgium, Denmark, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Norway withdrew from the group in June 1962. COPERS laid the groundwork for the establishment of two organizations, the European Space Research Organization (ESRO) headquartered in Paris and the European Launchers Development Organization (ELDO) centred in Kourou, French Guiana.

It should be noted that Denmark, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland chose not to be involved with ELDO, instead they remained members of ESRO only. At this point Australia became affiliated with ELDO by offering the use of its launch range at Woomera. Financial, organizational, and political problems arose and two additional temporary organizations were created, the

European Conference on Satellite Telecommunications and the European Space Conference. The European Conference on Satellite Telecommunications (CETS, in French acronym), was operational from 1963 to 1970. CETS conferred with the United States in an effort to create a world telecommunications system (INTELSAT). The European Space Conference (ESC) was an intergovernmental body which had the job of formulating a possible European Space Policy. ESC officially ended on 15 April 1975 with the signature of the agreement that established ESA.

The newly created European Space Agency inherited from ESRO the various establishments which were supported by the Paris Headquarters, namely the European Space Technology Centre (ESTEC) located in Noordwijk, the Netherlands, the European Space Organization



Kourou launching range (French Guiana)

Centre (ESOC) located in Darmstadt, Germany, and the European Space Research Institute (ESRIN) located in Frascati, near Rome, Italy. The latter became the Space Documentation Service (SDS) in 1972 and archived all the international space related documentation. SDS has since 1981 worked jointly with NASA's corresponding services. ESA was also given control of the launch ranges located both in Europe and in Fairbanks, Alaska (USA) and the still operative Kourou Centre in French Guiana. The various locations produced different and segmented regions of documentation accompanied with the obvious complexities for shipment and organization of archival work. At present the HAEC holds almost 106 meters of rich documentation divided into six separate holdings, namely COPERS, CETS, ESRO, ELDO, ESC and ESA. Its volume continues to grow with the current generation of ESA material.

The basic distinction in all materials from these ESA holdings is between the so-called blue papers, the official documentation coded with an alphanumeric symbol denoting the established body of the organization as well as the number of its serial office; and other files,

which are divided according to their office of origin and consist largely of correspondence, notes, minutes of meetings, and memoranda. The appraisal process discards all duplicates, insignificant notes, and all the documentation which is thematically reconsidered and duly detailed in successive documentation included in the archive. The blue papers are the final step of a documentary process, so that much of the reassembling of this material is eliminated, except when at an intermediate point there are some discrepancies between an earlier draft and the final form.

From a historical perspective, ESA documentation has allowed the chronicling of its evolutionary path men-

tioned above. Since 1975 ESA has played an increasingly significant international role, due in part to its cooperative efforts primarily with NASA, as well as with Japan, Canada, Africa, and China. The series of international relations files increase in both bulk and relevance as these joint programme initiatives are archived.

The Archives website (<http://wwwarc.iue.it>) offers users access to electronic pages related to the descriptions of ESA's group files.

GHERARDO BONINI