

European Space Sciences Committee (ESSC)

Editorial

In past months we focussed our efforts in three main directions. We first increased our interaction with ESSC Funding Organisations (EFOs). The annual EFO meeting held in September reached an agreement on our Financial Plan 2008-2012. The EFOs agreed on the absolute necessity to be able to support the minimum and vital level of activity for the Committee, i.e. salaries, plenary & Core Group meetings, travel funds for the Chair and ESF Space Sciences Unit, and administrative costs. Additional activities commissioned by various institutions can then be funded in an ad hoc fashion on top of this core budget. The ESSC will indeed only be able to live up to expectations if its core expenses are adequately supported. We also initiated a series of visits with our sponsors, starting with CNES in France. This will be continued in 2008 with the UK, Italy and Germany.

Secondly, we finalised the initial discussions leading to the recent approval by ESA D-HME Programme Board to externalise their peer-review to ESF-ESSC. This is a major achievement of our committee which will also support ESF's core activity.

Finally, we launched the third evaluation of ESA's ELIPS programme, following an established process initiated in 2000 by which the basis of this ESA programme is driven by the community. This recognition of ESSC-ESF's role as a worthy representative of the science community is growing and represents an asset to European decision-makers in the space arena.

2008 will be no less active, with several reports to be published and new activities starting, but above all, with the preparation of the next Ministerial Conference of ESA Member States, to be held in Den Haag in November 2008. This will represent a major milestone for European space sciences and ESSC will do its utmost to play a significant role in this context.

Jean-Pierre Swings
Chair of ESSC

Jean-Claude Worms
Head, Space Sciences Unit

Highlights

Exploration report

In 2005 ESA commissioned a study to ESSC to look at the science aspects of the Aurora programme in preparation for the December 2005 Ministerial Conference in Berlin. At that time ESSC had made it clear to ESA that the timeline imposed prior to the Berlin Conference had not allowed a proper consultation of the relevant science communities.

Following this recommendation, ESSC was asked again in the summer of 2006 to initiate a consultation to define a science-driven scenario for Aurora. This exercise ran between October 2006 and May 2007, was supervised by an ad hoc group and culminated at a scientific workshop held on 15-16 May 2007 in Athens. Following this consultation, and after further independent refereeing, the final report was published in February 2008.



Peer-review for ESA

At the end of 2006 ESA's HME directorate asked ESF to conduct the end-to-end scientific peer-review process of proposals received in reply to their Announcements of Opportunity. After an internal inventory of needs to fulfil this request a draft proposal was prepared and sent to ESA. It included a definition of the boundary conditions for this process to be carried out successfully, e.g. by finding the right referees for the tasks that will vary from one A.O. to the other, or assessing the quality of these reviewers in a continuous manner. All concerned units participated to the elaboration of that proposal. It is indeed ESF's quality standards in peer-review which are being sought by ESA, and this project will therefore be a fully corporate endeavour, supervised by the Space Sciences Unit. At the ESF General Assembly in November 2007 an ESA representative presented this offer to ESF Member Organisations delegates, who strongly supported it. At the HME Programme Board meeting of 11-12 February 2008, the ESA delegates for that science programme unanimously approved the outsourcing of peer review in the Life and Physical Sciences in Space to ESF.

Official negotiations will now start with ESA to initiate a contractual procedure. The agreement to be implemented between ESF and ESA will take the form of a 3-year framework contract and with a review some 12 months after completion of the first major evaluation round. This is a very significant cooperation starting between ESF and ESA. We now have a considerable responsibility lying ahead to make this peer-review activity a success.

ELIPS 2008

ESA D-HME asked the ESSC-ESF to organise a broad scientific consultation of the user community in preparation of the next ESA Ministerial Council (November 2008), in order to evaluate the achievements and define future strategic and scientific priorities of ESA's programme in life and physical sciences in space (ELIPS). This exercise constitutes the follow-on of the assessment studies performed at the "Bischenberg", Obernai and Evian workshops, which the ESF and ESSC organised in 2000 and 2004/05 to structure and assess the value of ESA's ELIPS programme. The first part of this consultation has just been concluded successfully during two 2-day workshops held on 25-26 and 28-29 February 2008 in Sasbachwalden, Germany. Over 160 scientists discussed the achievements of the ELIPS programme between 2004 and 2007, the expectations and requirements of the user community with regard its future and in particular the validity of the Cornerstone scheme which was updated in 2005, and the scientific perspectives of the Exploration programme which are relevant to the ELIPS programme.

The next milestone will be the synthesis workshop on 14 April. The final report to ESA should be available in June 2008.

CAREX

CAREX is a Coordination Action funded by the European Union Seventh Framework Programme. This project is coordinated by the British Antarctic Survey and involves 9 European Core Partners and 45 Associated Partners. Its two main objectives are to strengthen the structure of the community involved in life in extreme environments research, and to further the knowledge of life in extreme environment by developing a strategic research agenda in this field. The CAREX Project Manager is Nicolas Walter (ESF Space Sciences Unit).

Events 2008

- **Forging the future of space science (SSB-COSPAR Symposium)**
27 March 2008 – Paris (FR)
- **International reference architecture for space exploration (ESA)**
8-10 April 2008 – TBD
- **ELIPS evaluation synthesis workshop**
14 April 2008 – Brussels (BE)
- **European Geophysical Union Assembly**
14-18 April 2008 – Vienna (AT)
- **"Capri-style" SPC meeting (ESA)**
3-5 June 2008 – Aix-en-Provence (FR)
- **36th ESSC plenary meeting**
9-10 June 2008 – Madrid (ES)
- **SSB meeting and 50 years colloquium**
25-27 June 2008 – Washington (USA)
- **37th COSPAR Scientific Assembly**
13-20 July 2008 – Montreal (CAN)
- **ESA Ministerial Council**
25-26 November 2008 – Den Haag (NL)

Unit and Committee

- **Inge Vlamynck** was hired on an interim contract until 30 April 2008 to support the preparation and organisation of the Sasbachwalden workshops to evaluate the ELIPS programme.
- **Nicolas Walter** was promoted to the position of Science Officer in the Space Sciences Unit as of 1 January 2008, managing the CAREX project.
- A new **annual planning** was approved at the January plenary meeting.

Plenary meetings	Core Group meetings	EFO meeting	ESF General Assembly
May October	March September	January	November

- As of February 2008 the ESSC has **four disciplinary panels** instead of three, dealing with astronomy & fundamental physics; Earth sciences; research in weightlessness; solar system and exploration.
- **15 new members** will be recruited in the second half of 2008; 3 members left at the end of 2007. Currently the membership is 16, from 10 European countries.

The European Science Foundation (ESF) provides a platform for its Member Organisations to advance European research and explore new directions for research at the European level. Established in 1974 as an independent non-governmental organisation, the ESF currently serves 77 Member Organisations across 30 countries.

The European Space Sciences Committee (ESSC) is the ESF interface with the European Space Agency (ESA), the European Commission, national space agencies, and ESF Member Organisations on space-related aspects. The mission of the ESSC is to provide an independent European voice on European space research and policy.