

ESA Transfer Ownership Of European-Built ISS Observation Module To NASA

July 27 2005

Ownership of the European-built Cupola observation module for the International Space Station (ISS) was officially transferred to NASA on 7 July 2005. The signature, which took place at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida marks the conclusion of ESA's obligations for the Cupola's development as part of a bilateral barter agreement between ESA and NASA.

Under this agreement the European Space Agency provides the Cupola in exchange for Shuttle transportation services for European equipment and experiments for the Station. The 1.8 tonne Cupola will now remain in storage before being prepared for its launch, which is currently planned for the first quarter of 2009.

The Cupola is an observation and control tower for the International Space Station (ISS), with windows that provide a panoramic view through which operations on the outside of the Station can be observed and guided.

It is a pressurised module that will accommodate command and control workstations and other hardware. This will allow crewmembers in the Cupola to control the Space Station's robotic arm, which helps with the attachment and assembly of the various Station elements, and communicate with crewmembers in other parts of the Station or outside during spacewalk activities. The Cupola will further provide observational applications in the areas of Earth Observation and Space Science.

"The Cupola is just one example of how ESA is meeting its obligations to the International Space Station Programme," said Alan Thirkettle, ESA's Head of Development for the Directorate of Human Spaceflight, Microgravity and Exploration.

"It will provide a unique control and viewpoint for robotic work undertaken outside of the ISS and a welcome view of Earth for the Station crews. When it is launched in 2009 it will be joining Europe's other major contributions to the ISS including the Columbus Laboratory, due for launch in 2007, and the two connecting modules, Node 2 planned for launch in December 2006 and Node 3, which will also become the connection point for the Cupola, in 2008."

The document transferring ownership of the Cupola from ESA to NASA was signed on 7 July 2005 by Alan Thirkettle, on behalf of ESA, and Mike Suffredini, on behalf of William Gerstenmaier, NASA's International Space Station Programme Manager. Others present at the signing included ESA Cupola Project Manager, Philippe Deloo and Alenia Spazio Cupola Project Manager Doriana Buffa.

The Cupola's development started following signature of the contract between ESA and its prime contractor for the Cupola's development, Alenia Spazio, on 8 February 1999.

As prime contractor Alenia Spazio in Turin (Italy) coordinated six other European companies: CASA (Spain), APCO (Switzerland), SAAB Ericsson and Lindholmen Development (Sweden), EADS Space Transportation (Germany) and Verhaert (Belgium).

This development contract came to fruition when Alenia Spazio handed over ownership of the Cupola to ESA on 6 September 2004 at a ceremony in Turin. It was hereafter shipped to the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida (USA) for final verification testing.

"It is always a pleasure to see a project coming together so well with the contributions of Industry from many European countries," said Daniel Sacotte, ESA's Director of Human Spaceflight, Microgravity and Exploration. "The coming years will be a very exciting and challenging time for ESA as we see the core European ISS elements being launched and attached to the ISS, and contributing to the largest research facility in space."

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