

German named next head of European Space Agency

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German Aerospace Centre chairman Johann-Dietrich Woerner, seen here on November 13, 2014, will head up the European Space Agency from July 2015

Johann-Dietrich Woerner, head of German aerospace giant DLR, is to succeed Frenchman Jean-Jacques Dordain as next director-general of the European Space Agency, ESA announced on Thursday.

Woerner, 60, will start the four-year term on July 1, the agency said,

quoting a decision by ESA's ruling body.

ESA traces its roots back 50 years with the foundation of two organisations aimed at beefing up European collaboration in [space research](#) and rocket launchers.

They were consolidated into a single organisation in 1975.

The agency today comprises 20 member states, a figure likely to rise to 22 with the expected admission of Estonia and Hungary. Canada has a seat on its governing body and takes part in some projects under a cooperation agreement.

Dordain, aged 68, was first appointed in 2003.

His tenure has seen one of the most successful periods in ESA's history.

Missions include the comet-chasing probe Rosetta, the Herschel and Planck orbital observatories, unmanned exploration of Mars and Venus, resupply of the International Space Station (ISS) by robot freighters and a string of Earth-observation satellites.

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