

31 March 2000

Mr. Carl Bildt
Special Envoy of the Secretary-General
for the Balkans
United Nations
Room A 652
CH-1211 Geneva 10

Dear Mr. Bildt,

I would like to invite you to participate, together with Jean Peyrelevade and Lothar Späth, in a Wise Men Group, to provide me with independent advice on the evolution of the European Space Agency (ESA).

After 30 years of the successful development and operation of space systems in Europe the time has come to reflect on ESA's further evolution. Thanks to past successes, space systems are increasingly providing competitive solutions for implementing environmental, transport and communication policies. The European Union is evolving rapidly, extending its competence to the defence sector, regulating a Europe-wide knowledge-based economy, enlarging its membership and reforming its operating procedures. These converging developments resulted in a first step towards a closer relationship between ESA and the EU in 1999, when the Councils of both organisations asked for a European space strategy to be prepared jointly by the end of 2000.

ESA is a civil intergovernmental research and development organisation with its own Convention and Member States. Its Member States are almost the same as those of the European Union, minus Greece and Luxembourg, but with Norway and Switzerland. Any evolution of ESA will be prepared and decided upon by its Member States. It must however be set within a wider framework, and I therefore wish to seek advice and support from an independent high-level group of persons from outside the space world.

Aspects of the evolution of ESA which I would like to see addressed by this Wise Men Group include the organisation of the public space sector in Europe and ESA's role in that sector, the institutional relationship between ESA and the European Union, its consequences for synergy between civil and defence aspects, the enlargement of ESA to

Central and Eastern European countries, and the associated reform of the decision-making process.

The timetable for the Group's reflections and actions is related to the European political calendar which will provide opportunities for addressing the evolution of the public space sector at the highest political level. The successive Portuguese and French presidencies offer such opportunities in June and October this year, preparing the ground for the next ESA Council at Ministerial level planned in 2001. I would accordingly propose that the Group be set up in April, that the month of April be devoted to the individual knowledge update of the group members, and the first working meetings take place in May.

The Group will be supported by ESA staff under the leadership of J.J. Dordain, Director for Strategy and Technical Assessment. This support group will in particular prepare background documents you may need and organise logistics for your meetings and hearings at your convenience.

I shall be happy to meet you at your convenience and to provide you with more information you may require about the purpose and scope of the Group's deliberations.

I hope you will be able to reply positively to this invitation and I look forward to your participation in this Group, which will be instrumental for the future utilisation of space to the benefit of Europe.

Yours sincerely,

Antonio Rodotà