

Welcome

M. De Mazière

I am glad to welcome today

Mr. Beka, Belgian High Representation of Space Policy,

Mr. Mettens, the President of the Federal Belgian Science Policy or, shortly, BELSPO

Mr. Monteny, Director general Research and Space at BELSPO

Mr. Suys, representing the Federal Secretary of State charged with, among others, Science Policy, who apologized for not being able to come herself

the invited speakers, Prof. Brasseur and Prof. Gérard,

and all of you, colleagues from Belgium and abroad, and friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you at this Academic Session, which is the final event that we organized to celebrate our 50th anniversary.

The Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy was established by Royal Decree as an independent Scientific Institute, exactly 50 years ago, on November 25, 1964, building on the Aeronomy Service that had developed in the preceding years at the Royal Meteorological Institute. Our first Director was Prof. Marcel Nicolet, born in 1912 and one of the founders of the discipline of aeronomy – a discipline that emerged in the years 1930. The term ‘Aeronomy’ was suggested for the first time by Sydney Chapman in a Letter to the Editor of the journal *Nature* in 1946, and was adopted officially in 1954 by the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics. Today, aeronomy refers to the science of the atmosphere, from the surface to the Sun, including atmospheres of planets and comets.

[I should not omit to remind you of the fact that, in 1987, Prof. Nicolet was honoured for his achievements by King Baudouin with the title of Baron.

Prof. G. Brasseur, who is our first speaker today, will tell you more about the history of aeronomy and the evolution of our Institute in his presentation.]

I cannot tell you for sure whether it is a coincidence or not, but it is quite remarkable that in that same year of 1964, after 4 years of preparation, the Convention that created the European Space Research Organisation or ESRO, came into force. This Convention was co-signed by Belgium. The first director of ESRIN was appointed also in 1964. In 1973, at the European Space Conference meeting in Brussels, it was decided to create ESA – which happened officially in 1975; Belgium has been a member state of ESA from the start.

So our Institute and ESA have part of their histories in common, and space has been and still is a major element in our research.

The mission that was given to our Institute in 1964 was updated in 2002 and reads (after translation to English):

“The missions of the Institute have as their major objectives the acquisition of scientific and technological expertise and the dissemination of information in the field of space aeronomy. They imply scientific research and the development of scientific services, as well as partnerships with industries.”

The Royal Decree further states:

“To perform these tasks, it is essential to acquire knowledge based on data from space-borne systems, rockets, balloons and all complementary means. This knowledge concerns the physics and chemistry of the atmospheres of planets and comets, and of the interplanetary space. It also concerns knowledge of the impact of the sun on the Earth atmosphere, in particular in the context of global changes. “

This Royal Decree, and so our mission, is still in force today.

This afternoon, we will take you on a trip through our history, showing how we fulfill our mission since 50 years. We will show you where we come from, where we are and where we go, or at least where we **want to** and where we **can** go, if we get the necessary political and financial support.

We recognize and are thankful for all the support that we have received in all those past years from various organisations, including ESA and EUMETSAT, CNES, the European Commission, the Funds for Scientific Research (called FWO and FNRS), and many others.

In particular we are thankful to the Belgian Federal State and Belgian Science Policy for their continuous support. Therefore, I will immediately after the end of these welcome words give the floor to Dr. F. Monteny, Director general Research and Space, at the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office.

But before that, I should not forget to tell you that in the year of our 50th anniversary, we hope to get the attribution 'Royal' in our name, and so, hopefully, we will become the Royal Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy.

And so, now, it is with pleasure that I give the floor to Dr. Monteny of Belspo.