

## ***Space policy***

### **Summary of advisory report 36**

#### **Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy (AWT)**

Last year saw publication of the report of the fact-finding committee for space technology (VCRT). In its present advice the Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy (AWT) gives its response to this report. It takes the opportunity to look in a more general sense at space policy, bearing in mind the necessary reorientation of this field.

Dutch government policy on space travel has in the last fifteen years been targeted at boosting industrial support and increasing the involvement of users in the development of space technology. Whereas in the early eighties Dutch expenditure on space research was relatively less than that of other European countries, since then it has caught up fast. As in France, this government expenditure in the Netherlands has risen substantially more sharply than in other European countries.

It is the finding of the AWT that in spite of the sharp increase in resources, the results of the policy pursued have not met expectations. Industrial support has not been boosted, on the contrary this support has diminished; there is no spin-off of any significance to other sectors and there has only been partial success in involving users financially in the development of space technology.

The AWT concludes that the scale of Dutch government expenditure on space research cannot be justified from the commercial or industrial point of view. With the exception of perhaps a few subfields, commercial development of space travel without government support is not realistic. In so far as industry can participate, it can only do so thanks to subsidies.

One argument for continuing to participate in the industrial programmes of ESA is the fact that the principal ESA technology centre is located in the Netherlands, namely ESTEC in Noordwijk. This 'chance' factor affords a major financial and economic advantage to the Netherlands and that will certainly come under pressure if the Netherlands no longer participates in the industrial programmes. The Council therefore thinks that the option of continuing to participate in the said programmes should at the least be rendered dependent on the possibility of ESTEC remaining in the Netherlands on its present scale.

Securing ESTEC is only possible if ESA develops in breadth and in strength. However, the position of ESA is not unchallenged. It is not inconceivable that ESA will be 'stripped' to an agency for scientific research and that the large European countries will aim at their own multilateral alliances for technological research. A development of this kind would be bad for the Netherlands. In the first place because it would undoubtedly mean the undermining of ESTEC. Secondly, it will be even more difficult via this route for Dutch participants to take part in interesting space projects. The AWT therefore supports the policy of keeping ESA on its feet and where possible reinforcing it. If this fails, the scale of the subsidies will need to be weighed up again (by the politicians). The committee observes that in its view there is a lack of

coordination between the various interested parties in the Netherlands in the development of space technology. It recommends the establishment of a space technology agency (RTA) with wide powers.

The AWT disagrees with this recommendation. It does not consider it the obvious thing to do to make decisions on policy remote from the government for a political matter such as space travel. Neither does it see the advantages of trying to get needs and expertise to link up within the Netherlands. In its view it is far more obvious for the various parties to combine forces at the European level, preferably within the context of the EU.

The AWT heartily endorses the committee's plea for more attention to be focused on system engineering training at both pre- and post-doctoral level.

