

Mission to the Public: A Journalist's Experiences with European Astronomers and Space Agencies

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January 2004 – NASA lands two rovers on Mars. The landings are covered worldwide live by CNN with millions of people joining it. January 2005 – ESA lands a probe on Titan. The landing is covered live in the ESOC control room with a few scientists and VIPs on site. The first pictures of the unknown world are presented to the public hours later.

July 2004 – NASA has the Cassini spacecraft in orbit around Saturn. Each day a new picture is released by the Cassini team. January 2004 – ESA has a wonderful spacecraft in orbit around Mars. 16 months later, some 35 Mars Express images are online.

That are just two examples of a communicator's nightmare. What's going wrong in Europe? Why are many scientists so reluctant to communicate their research to the public? Why isn't public relations work an integral part of any project financed by the European taxpayer? Is a scientific observation or a scientific paper really more important than a nice picture making the front page of many newspapers?

Europe is doing great scientifically and technologically – but for some reason, this is not communicated. Can we change the attitude of scientists and agencies towards public communication?