

BepiColombo Euro-Japan Joint mission to Mercury: Project Status update

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BepiColombo is a ESA-JAXA joint mission to Mercury with the aim to understand the process of planetary formation and evolution in the hottest part of the proto-planetary nebula as well as to understand similarities and differences between the magnetospheres of Mercury and Earth.

The baseline mission consists of two spacecraft, i.e. the Mercury Planetary Orbiter (MPO) and the Mercury Magnetospheric Orbiter (MMO). The two orbiters will be launched in 2012 in one Soyuz-Fregat 2B. JAXA is responsible for the development and operation of MMO, while ESA is responsible for the development and operation of MPO as well as the launch, transport, and the insertion of two spacecraft into their dedicated orbits.

JAXA has made conceptual design of the MMO spacecraft system (including the interface with the cruising composite system in collaboration with ESA) with model payload. MMO is designed as a spin-stabilized spacecraft to be placed in a 400 km x 12000 km polar orbit. The spacecraft will accommodate instruments mostly dedicated to the study of the magnetic field, waves, and particles near Mercury.

Last year ESA and JAXA issued the announcement of opportunity (A/O) to the Japanese and European science community to call for proposals of the PI responsible instruments. The selection of those instruments has been done on November 2004. The first BepiColombo science working team (SWT) meeting, which discusses science related matters, will be held on March this year. In this paper, we will report the latest information of this mission including the report of SWT.