

Interview with WIA-Europe's Chair of the Board
Claudia Kessler
from International Astronautical Federation



Qualified as an aerospace engineer, Claudia Kessler has worked for more than 15 years in the space industry gaining considerable experience within international companies. Through her involvement in many international space projects she has built up a wide network within the business.

From that background she formed the German office of HE Space Operations in Bremen in April 2004 and has since developed it into one of the most significant suppliers of manpower support to the space industry. Claudia became Chief Executive Officer of [] [HE Space in 2008.

You have helped to set up Women In Aerospace Europe (WiA-E). Can you explain the idea?

Simonetta Di Pippo (Director of Human Spaceflight, ESA) and I had a conversation in March 2009 where we were looking at opportunities for European women in our industry. Looking around, we were seeing many female engineers in Europe - 50% as a proportion in some establishments but at the same time noticing a "glass ceiling". Fewer women are promoted to leadership positions.

By June, we were thinking of setting up a group for women aerospace engineers when we noticed that in the United States there was already an organisation called Women in Aerospace. Indeed I personally knew Debra F. Lepore from my days at the International Space University and from our shared membership of the IAA. She turned out to be the Chair of the Board of WiA.

Most larger companies are represented in WiA and notable people such as Laurie Garver and Barbara Griffin are very active. There have 600 members and have been in operation for 20 years now.

So, seeing the position of women in the industry being different in both Europe and the USA, a decision was made to set up Women In Aerospace Europe.

What are the aims of Women In Aerospace Europe?

We have started steadily. By the end of August we already had 25 members and aim for 100 by the end of the year. EADS Astrium has joined as a platinum member so there is a lot of interest already.

We are in the middle of setting up our own website and have registered the organisation in the Netherlands.

But key to the planning is that, while we may be setting up a European part of WiA, the goal remains having a global association with a global board. We see a WiA "brand" but with independent spin-offs such as WiA-E reflecting local challenges and conditions.

Finally, you are CEO of HE Space Operations. Can you tell us a little about HE Space?

I joined HE Space in 2004 after spells with both Kaiser-Threde and Astrium. I set up the Bremen office to complement the existing office in Katwijk, the Netherlands. Since 2008 I am CEO for the whole company with offices in the Netherlands, Germany and Houston.

HE Space attracts and finds talented individuals for the space industry. We aim to be the most sought-after high-quality on-site space knowledge provider in Europe by 2015. We are currently hiring an average of two people per month for clients such as ESA, GSOC and Astrium. Our staff, totalling over 100, come from 20 different countries. We are very international!

Outside the official business of HE Space, we are interested in the development of the next generation. HE Space has been involved in a sports initiative and I was involved with the IAF's Youth Grants programme.