



Figure 17.31 The weather satellite Meteosat, developed by the European Space Agency ESA

A further development of the Pathfinder is the Helios Prototype (Figure 17.33). The craft has a wingspan of 80 m, $2\frac{1}{2}$ times that of the solar-powered Pathfinder's flying wing, and longer than the Boeing 747 jetliner. Helios, which is relatively cheap to run and is harmless to the environment, is being developed mainly for commercial uses. Since the plane will be able to observe the Earth from a high-level altitude and will also function as a relay station for radio communications, its potential applications include weather observation as well as a collection of information in case of volcano eruptions and/or earthquakes.