

EU not supporting space sector: Astrium head

September 6 2010



A picture released by the European Space Agency in June 2010 at the launch site in Kourou, French Guiana, shows the launch of a rocket carrying Arabsat's satellite, made by Astrium and Thales Alenia Space. The EU executive commission is not providing sufficient support to the European space industry, the head of French space group Astrium said in an interview published on Monday.

The EU executive commission is not providing sufficient support to the European space industry, currently locked in close competition with its US counterpart, the head of French space group Astrium said in an interview published on Monday.

"Every country is backing its industry, except Europe," argued Astrium chairman Francois Augue in the French financial paper Les Echos.

"If Brussels implements the policy that is being developed, it will ultimately mean the end of Europe's [space industry](#) presence on the world scene."

The European Commission wants to boost competition in the EU aerospace sector notably by supporting small and medium-sized companies. It has awarded a contract to German firm OHB to build 14 satellites for the European geo-positioning system Galileo.

"It's extremely worrying," Auque told Les Echos. "The real question is the following: 'who is going to take on the American exporters?' And the response is 'the big companies.'"

Astrium, a subsidiary of the European aerospace group EADS, last year sold seven telecommunications satellites but is less optimistic about its performance in 2010.

"In 2010, to maintain a pace of five (satellite sales) a year would be a very good result," Auque said.

He foresaw sales this year below the 8.5 billion euros (11 billion dollars) recorded in 2009 because of "a slowdown in institutional orders."

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Citation: EU not supporting space sector: Astrium head (2010, September 6) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-09-eu-space-sector-astrium.html>

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