

Austria to launch first satellites in 2011

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Austria will launch its first ever satellites into space next year to measure variations in the brilliance of stars, a project leader from the Technical University (TU) of Graz announced Friday.

The two cube-shaped satellites -- each measuring just 20 centimetres (eight inches) per side and weighing seven kilograms (15 pounds) -- are part of a joint project with Canada and Poland entitled "BRITE" (Bright Target Explorer).

Developed by TU Graz and the Technical University of Vienna, in collaboration with the University of Toronto in Canada, the two mini-satellites will measure the light intensity of stars with more precision than was possible until now, Otto Koudelka from TU Graz said Friday.

This could help explain how stars are formed and reveal further clues about the history of the universe, he explained.

The Austrian satellites will be launched aboard an Indian rocket in late July, although a clear date as not yet been set.

Four further satellites, two from Poland and two from Canada, will then follow in 2012.

According to Koudelka, this would be the first project involving multiple mini-satellites with the same mission.

"That way, we can maximise the observation time, the scientific gains

will be that much greater," he told the [Austria](#) Press Agency.

Ground control stations in Graz and Vienna, as well as compatible stations in Poland and Canada, will download data from the satellites.

The satellites' life expectancy was estimated at two years, but the chances were "very good they will survive much longer," said Koudelka.

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