

Launch of EU's Galileo system set for Friday

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In this photo provided by the European Space Agency (ESA), Russia's Soyuz VS01 rocket sits on its launching pad, Wednesday, Oct. 19, 2011, in the space base of Kourou, French Guiana . The Russian Federal Space Agency and Arianespace, the commercial arm of the 13-country European Space Agency, will launch tomorrow, Thursday, Oct. 20, 2011, the Soyuz rocket from the European spaceport in South America, carrying two Galileo navigation satellites in its maiden flight. (AP Photo/ESA, S. Corvaja) EDITORIAL USE ONLY, NO SALES

The launch of the first two satellites for the European Union's Galileo navigation system was postponed until Friday - adding at least one more day to years of waiting for a program promoted as the main rival to GPS to get off the ground.

The [Galileo system](#), which has become a symbol of EU infighting, inefficiency and delay, is expected to open trans-Atlantic competition with the ubiquitous American [GPS network](#).

The EU had all the pomp and speeches about the dawning of a new age prepared for Thursday, but was forced to postpone it for at least 24 hours because of a leaky valve that kept a Russian Soyuz rocket grounded at the launch site in [French Guiana](#) on the northern coast of South America.

GPS has become the global consumer standard in satellite navigation over the past decade, reducing the need for awkward oversized maps and arguments with back seat drivers about whether to turn left or right.

Now, the EU wants Galileo to dominate the future with a system which is more precise, more reliable than GPS, while controlled by civil authorities. It foresees applications ranging from precision seeding on farmland to pinpoint positioning for search-and-rescue missions. On top of that, the EU hopes it will reap a financial windfall.

"If Europe wants to be competitive and independent in the future, the EU needs to have its own [satellite navigation system](#) to also create new [economic opportunities](#)", said Herbert Reul, head of the EU parliament's industry, research and energy committee.

There are still several more years to wait, but the satellite launch is a major step in getting Galileo on track. It will start operating in 2014 as a free consumer navigation service, with more specialized services to be rolled out until 2020, when it should be fully operational. After the initial launch, two satellites will go up every quarter as of the end of 2012 until all 30 satellites are up.

The EU hopes its economic impact will stand at about euro90 billion (\$125 billion) in industrial revenues and public benefits over the next two decades.

The idea for the program first rallied support in the late 1990s, and its

development has been pushed back with delays ever since. When it became clear in 2008 that private investors weren't lining up to finance Galileo, the EU decided taxpayers would underwrite most of the program.

The European Commission said development and deployment since 2003 is estimated at well over euro5 billion (\$6.8 billion). Maintaining and completing the system is expected to cost euro1 billion (\$1.35 billion) a year.

Critics have said the cost overruns were much higher.

"Far from celebrating," officials "who have supported Galileo should be making a public apology to taxpayers for this shocking waste of time, effort and resources," EU legislator Marta Andreasen of the anti-Euro UKIP party said.

Officials hope to delay the launch of the [Russian Soyuz rocket](#) by only 24 hours, although a new date will be announced once the investigation is complete, said Jean-Yves Le Gall, chairman and CEO of Arianespace, the commercial arm of the European Space Agency.

The launch was originally scheduled for last year, but adverse weather kept delaying construction of the Soyuz facility.

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