

Europe's Vega rocket launch set for early 2012

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Europe's Vega rocket is launched in French Guiana in 2007. Europe's new Vega rocket, which can place a 1.5-ton satellite into low-Earth orbit, is expected to see its first launch early next year, Arianespace chief Jean-Yves Le Gall said Thursday.

Europe's new Vega rocket, which can place a 1.5-ton satellite into low-Earth orbit, is expected to see its first launch early next year, Arianespace chief Jean-Yves Le Gall said Thursday.

"We will have the first launch in January or February, Le Gall told AFP in Washington, while noting that he expected to sign contracts soon for the Italian-built rocket.

Vega, which broadens the range of European launch vehicles with a smaller rocket, is expected to carry a scientific satellite named Ares on

its first mission.

The [European Space Agency](#) has planned a series of five Vega launches from the space center in French Guiana.

Vega, with a payload capacity of 1.5 tons, is to be deployed from the launchpad of the old Ariane-1 rocket. ESA had hoped to have the rocket take its maiden flight by the end of 2009.

Le Gall said the [global economic slowdown](#) has so far had a limited impact on the number of launches.

"Just because there is an economic crisis it does not mean people stop [watching television](#) or using their iPads," he said.

He noted that Arianespace would participate in the launch of a [Soyuz rocket](#) later this year from the Russian space center.

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