

Europe's Vega rocket launch set for early February

January 9 2012



The Vega rocket is seen in Kourou, French Guiana, in 2007. The maiden voyage of Europe's Vega rocket, designed to launch small payloads of about 1.5 tonnes into low-Earth orbit, is set for February 9, the head of the European Space Agency said Monday.

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"The target date for the Vega launch, set with all the partners involved -- Arianespace, industry, other space agencies -- is February 9," ESA's Director General Jean-Jacques Dordain said at a press conference.

The rocket is scheduled to lift the LARES (Laser Relativity Satellite), along with several other micro-satellites, from the Ariane launch site in

Kourou, French Guiana.

The ESA had hoped to put the first Vega into space as early as 2009, and in October set a January 30 date for the light rocket's first voyage.

"Goodness knows it is a very difficult campaign. Everything is new," Dordain said, adding that he was confident the new date would hold.

Bringing Vega on line means that Europe will have completed its three-pronged launch capability.

Heavy-lifter Ariane ES can hoist the 20 tonnes Automated Transfer Vehicle (ATV) supply module to the [International Space Station](#), while the Ariane ECA is designed mainly to lift [communications satellites](#) weighing up to 10 tonnes into geostationary orbit.

The Russian workhorse [Soyuz rocket](#), launched for the first time from the Ariane site in October, carries mid-sized loads.

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