

EU signs orders for eight new Galileo space satellites

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A model of the Galileo satellite hangs at the German Aerospace Center in Oberpfaffenhofen, near Wessling, Bavaria, in 2011. The EU on Thursday signed contracts with German and French engineering firms to build and launch another eight satellites for its Galileo geopositioning system.

The EU on Thursday signed contracts with German and French engineering firms to build and launch another eight satellites for its Galileo geopositioning system.

Aiming to provide rival global satellite navigation services from 2014, the contract with Germany's OHB System AG is for 250 million euros, with France's [Arianespace](#) and Astrium SAS sharing launch orders worth another 60 million euros.

"For Galileo, today's signing signifies the concrete roll-out of the programme is on time and within budget," Antonio Tajani, European

Union industry commissioner, said in a statement.

The signings were in London.

Galileo satellites are currently launched in pairs aboard the [Russian Soyuz rocket](#) and the first two went up in October from the Kourou space base in EU [French Guiana](#), South America.

That was the first time that Soyuz -- a national treasure for Russia -- had launched other than from Russia's bases at [Plesetsk](#) and Baikonur.

Galileo, budgeted at 5.4 billion euros (7.2 billion dollars), is intended to give Europe independence in satellite navigation, a vital component of the 21st-century economy, from the US [Global Positioning System](#) (GPS).

When completed in 2020, the EU-funded system will comprise 27 operational satellites and three spares.

They will orbit at a height of 23,200 kilometres (14,400 miles) in three orbital planes, providing accuracy to within a metre (3.25 feet), compared to three to eight metres (10 and 26 feet) for GPS, according to official websites.

According to the European Commission, the market for geopositioning services will grow from 130 billion euros (\$180 billion) in 2010 to 240 billion euros by 2020.

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