

Europe launches new satellites into space

May 7 2013



The European Space Agency's Vega rocket is shown on its launch pad in 2011 at the Kourou Space Centre, French Guiana. Europe's lightweight rocket, Vega, was launched from Kourou late Monday for the first mission, webcast live, since its maiden flight in February last year.

Europe's lightweight rocket, Vega, was launched from Kourou space base in French Guiana late Monday for the first mission, webcast live, since its maiden flight in February last year.

The rocket lifted off at 0206 GMT Tuesday, carrying two small Earth-observation satellites and a [microsatellite](#).

A launch scheduled for Saturday morning had been cancelled because of poor weather conditions.

According to the [European Space Agency](#) (ESA), the 140-kilogramme (300-pound) Proba-V satellite is designed to map vegetation cover as an aid to monitor crops and predict famines.

The 115-kg (250-pound) VNREDSat-1 was designed as a climate-monitoring tool for Vietnam's academy of science and technologies.

The third item of the payload is a 1.3-kg (2.86-pound) Estonian microsatellite, ESTCube-1, that will test an electric [solar sail](#)—a passive form of [spacecraft propulsion](#) in which the drive comes from particles blasted out by the Sun.

Vega carried out its first flight on February 13, 2012—culminating a more than 12-year quest by the ESA to complete a range of space launchers that covers all categories of payloads.

The 30-metre (100-foot) launcher is designed to hoist multiple payloads, ranging from 300 kg (660 pounds) to 2.5 tonnes, into orbits ranging from 300 to 1,500 kilometres (190-940 miles) from Earth, depending on their mass.

The rocket cost 776 million euros, or just over a billion dollars, to develop.

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