

# New chief urges Ariane 5 modification for big satellites

June 4 2013

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The Ariane 5 VA213 moves to final assembly building at Kourou space center, French Guiana in this Airanspace photo from March 11, 2013. The new head of European satellite launch firm Arianespace on Tuesday called for a fast-track modification of the Ariane 5 launcher to help it place larger satellites into orbit.

The new head of European satellite launch firm Arianespace on Tuesday called for a fast-track modification of the Ariane 5 launcher to help it place larger satellites into orbit.

Stephane Israel, who took over as [Arianespace](#)'s chairman and chief executive from Jean-Yves Le Gall in April, said in an interview with AFP that he considered the plan one of his "two main priorities."

Just last November, ministers of the [European Space Agency](#) (ESA) agreed after tough debate to fund a new [launcher](#) called Ariane 5 ME, and work towards a successor rocket, Ariane 6, whose maiden flight would be in 2021 or 2022.

But Israel said he also wanted a "fast-track adaptation" of the existing [Ariane 5 ECA](#), "which would be available in less than two years." He described it as a "quick win."

It would slightly increase payload volume, enabling the rocket to handle larger electric-propelled satellites, one of the most promising areas of the satellite-launch market.

"Our analysis is that satellites are going to be more voluminous, so we need to gain a bit of space under the fairing," or nose-cone, he said in an interview with AFP.

The proposed "Ariane 5 ECA Adaptation" would not affect plans for the Ariane 5 ME and Ariane 6, he said.

"The cost would be very limited, in the region of several dozen million euros" (dollars), he said.

Arianespace markets the services of Ariane, the Russian-made medium-range [Soyuz](#) and the lightweight Vega at ESA's base at Kourou, French Guiana.

The ministerial decision in Naples last November was a compromise between leading ESA members France and Germany, and came at a time

of tightening budget constraints.

France had been pushing for a smaller, sleeker Ariane 6, able to deal with one or multiple [payloads](#) up to about six tonnes, to meet an expected trend towards smaller satellites. It would require investment of about four billion euros (\$5.2 billion).

Industrialists preferred a German-backed option, an Ariane 5 ME (for "Midlife Evolution"), able to carry two large satellites each weighing five to six tonnes, and using a new engine, the Vinci, that can reignite in order to drop off payloads in different orbits. It would be ready by 2017 at a putative cost of two billion euros (\$2.6 billion).

In the end, engineers will push ahead with the ME but try to ensure that its technology is compatible with the Ariane 6.

At the same time, ESA will carry out a review this year of the fast-changing market for [satellite](#) launches.

In other comments, Israel said his other big plan was to speed up launch preparation time at Kourou, so that a typically three-week gap between operations was reduced to two weeks.

"Obviously, it all has to be talked through with all of Arianespace's partners and shareholders," he cautioned.

An Ariane 5 ES is due to lift off from Kourou late Wednesday bearing the fourth of ESA's five cargo vehicles for resupplying the International Space Station.

Weighing 20.2 tonnes, it will be the biggest payload hoisted into space by Europe.

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Citation: New chief urges Ariane 5 modification for big satellites (2013, June 4) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-chief-urges-ariane-modification-big.html>

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