

Russia halts Proton rocket launches after accident

July 4 2013



Image taken on December 5, 2010 shows a Proton-M rocket blasting off from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Russia is suspending the launches of Proton rockets after an unmanned rocket carrier exploded on takeoff this week, a source on the cosmodrome said Thursday.

Russia is suspending the launches of Proton rockets after an unmanned rocket carrier exploded on takeoff this week, a source on the Russian Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan said Thursday.

"The [investigation commission](#) that is looking into the causes of the accident on July 2 has made a decision to stop the preparations for the planned Proton rocket launches from Baikonur," the source told Interfax news agency.

The next launch was set for July 20, he said, but the rocket, as well as the Briz-M upper stage rocket and the satellite Astra 2E that was to be carried into space were on Thursday being moved to storage.

"Due to the accident the launches will be pushed back to later dates and will resume only after the commission finishes its work and after its recommendations are put to use," the source added.

Other Proton launches this year were scheduled for the American radio satellite Sirius FM6 on August 14, Russia's Kosmos military satellite on September 5, Russian communications satellite Ekspress AM5 in October and Turkish Turksat 4A in November, he said.

The Proton rocket is Russia's most popular for unmanned commercial launches and analysts have said that Tuesday's accident, in which a Proton-M rocket fell apart mid-air, was a major blow that could lead businessmen to look for alternative carriers.

Astra 2E was manufactured by EADS to provide broadcast and broadband services in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The website of SES [satellite operator](#) gave its [launch](#) date as July 21.

On Tuesday, the ill-fated carrier rocket veered off its vertical trajectory and dramatically erupted into a ball of fire before falling to the ground a couple of kilometres from the launchpad. Locals were told to stay indoors due to the danger of noxious fumes from the rocket's toxic fuel.

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said after the accident that

"harsh decisions" will be taken and that "Russia's [rocket](#) and space industry cannot continue to exist in its current form."

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