

Russia puts satellite in orbit from sea platform after 2013 flop

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A Russian Zenit-3SLB rocket carrying a satellite blasts off from the launchpad at Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome on October 6, 2011

Russia has sent a European communications satellite into orbit from a floating platform in the Pacific Ocean, after the last launch in 2013 ended with the satellite plunging into the sea.

The Zenit-3SL rocket blasted off at 2209 GMT on Monday from the

Odyssey launch pad and reached its orbit around an hour later, said the Sea Launch international consortium, 95 percent of which is controlled by Russia.

"Sea Launch went according to plan. The control of the (satellite) has been handed over," Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who oversees Russia's space programme, wrote on Twitter.

Sea Launch has been using the deep-sea platform named Odyssey to perform commercial operations since 1999.

Boeing of the United States and Norway's Aker ASA indirectly control five percent of the Swiss-based company, created in 1995, which has faced severe financial problems.

The last launch on February 1, 2013 failed, with the Zenit rocket—made from parts produced both in Ukraine and Russia—falling into the sea without managing to put a US Intelsat satellite into orbit.

The last planned launch of a Eutelsat 3B built by Airbus Defence and Space had been postponed from April 16 due to fresh technical problems.

Russia's space-rocket company Energia has said it plans to use the sea platform for four launches in 2014 and five in 2015.

Russia in recent years has experienced a series of embarrassing failures in the space sphere, leading to the loss of numerous satellites and other equipment.

Earlier this month, a Proton rocket carrying a European satellite fell to Earth less than 10 minutes after it was launched at Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

In October last year, the Russian authorities dismissed the head of the space agency, Vladimir Popovkin, who was replaced by Oleg Ostapenko as part of a huge project to reform this highly strategic sector.

The former head of space-rocket company Energia, Vitaly Lopota, faces a criminal investigation into alleged abuse of office over loans to companies taking part in Sea Launch.

Energia owns a controlling share in Sea Launch through an affiliated company.

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