

# Europe launches next phase of hi-tech Earth satellites

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A Vega rocket is seen lifting off from the European Space Agency's base in Kourou, French Guiana, in February 2015

The European Space Agency (ESA) has launched the second phase of a 4.3-billion-euro (\$4.91-billion) programme to deploy new-generation satellites to monitor environmental damage and aid disaster relief operations, officials said.

Sentinel-2A was hoisted by a lightweight Vega rocket from ESA's base in Kourou, French Guiana, overnight Monday-Tuesday, launch operator Arianespace said.

The 1.1-tonne polar-orbiting satellite is designed to loop the world every 100 minutes, providing high-definition optical imaging of vegetation, soil and freshwater to a resolution of 10 metres (32.5 feet), helping monitoring of forest cover, water stress and crop health. It will also provide information for emergency services.

It and a partner are the second of six scheduled pairs of Earth-monitoring satellites under the Copernicus programme, an initiative headed by the European Union's executive Commission in conjunction with ESA.

Sentinel-1A, designed to scan the Earth's surface with cloud-penetrating radar, was launched in April 2014. Sentinels 1B and 2B are due for deployment in 2016, according to the ESA website.

Copernicus succeeds Envisat, one of the most successful environmental satellites in space history, whose mission ended in 2012.

The programme was initially called Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES), but was renamed in 2013 to honour the 16th-century Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus, who determined the Earth orbited the Sun, and not the other way around, as convention had it at the time.

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