

European Space Agency launches new laser communications hub

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The European Space Agency says a new laser terminal has been launched into orbit as part of wider efforts to develop Europe's first optical communications network, a system able to monitor natural disasters and other catastrophes.

The European Data Relay System terminal, launched Friday from Kazakhstan, was released from its host satellite Saturday morning.

The stationary hub will collect information from surveillance satellites and relay it using an ultra-fast laser data connection to the ground.

The agency and its partner, Airbus Defense and Space, say they will begin testing the system in the next few days and start delivering services to customers in the summer. A second data relay node is scheduled for launch next year, a third in 2020.

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