Vega rocket launches from French Guiana

September 3 2020

Europe's Vega rocket returned to the skies on Wednesday from French Guiana in its first mission since a failed launch last year.

The rocket left Earth around an hour before midnight local time after the launch was postponed numerous times, most recently due to a typhoon passing over a tracking station in South Korea.

The coronavirus pandemic and persistent winds over the South American launch site also caused delays.

Vega successfully deployed 53 small satellites—most weighing less than 15 kilogrammes (33 pounds)—on behalf of clients from 13 countries.

"I hope these microsatellites enjoyed their ride on Europe's direct line to space!" Stephane Israel, chief executive of launch service provider Arianespace, wrote on Twitter.

The Vega rocket is a crucial component of Europe's ambitions to compete in the booming aerospace market, where it faces strong competition from rivals including Elon Musk's SpaceX.

Its last mission in July 2019 failed around two minutes after take-off because of an apparent structural failure that caused the launcher to split in two.

It was the first failed mission after 14 successful launches since it began operations in 2012.

European Space Agency director general Jan Woerner said Wednesday's launch was an "extremely important project" that heralded the comeback of the Vega rocket class.

© 2020 AFP