

First launch of Europe's Ariane 6 rocket planned for June-July

November 30 2023



The Ariane 6 rocket undergoes a successful dress rehearsal at Europe's Spaceport in French Guiana last week.

The European Space Agency announced on Thursday that the long-delayed first launch of its next-generation Ariane 6 rocket will take place

between June 15 and July 31 next year.

The [rocket](#) launcher system was initially planned to blast off in 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic and repeated [technical issues](#) have kept it on the ground, depriving Europe of an independent way to send heavy missions into space.

ESA chief Josef Aschbacher told a press conference that the announcement of the 2024 launch date range came after the "complete success" of a dress rehearsal at Europe's spaceport in French Guiana last week.

That [test](#) involved firing up the launcher's Vulcain 2.1 engine and running it for more than seven minutes.

Aschbacher said it was a "good day" for European space efforts, adding that a more precise launch date is expected to be announced in March or April 2024.

Philippe Baptiste, the head of French [space](#) agency CNES, said that the decision about an exact date would follow a "general qualification review" of the launcher.

The Ariane 6 still has to pass two more tests under "degraded conditions" on December 3 and 15.

Martin Sion, CEO of the rocket's manufacturer ArianeGroup, said these tests will verify that the launcher's "reliability and robustness" meets expectations.

The Ariane 6 was designed to keep up with rising competition in the rocket market including from billionaire Elon Musk's SpaceX.

Its workhorse predecessor, the Ariane 5, blasted off for the last time in July after 27 years of launches.

With the smaller Vega C grounded following a launch failure in December and Russia withdrawing its Soyuz rockets in response to sanctions over Moscow's war in Ukraine, the ESA has been left without an independent way to launch missions until the Ariane 6 is ready.

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