

ESA gives up bids to contact stranded Russian space probe

2 December 2011



A Zenit-2SB rocket, carrying the Phobos-Grunt (Phobos-Soil) spacecraft, stands at a launch pad in November 2011. The European Space Agency said it will no longer try to make contact with Russia's stranded Mars probe Phobos-Grunt if attempts made Friday fail.

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"We have already told our colleagues at the (Russian) Lavochkin institute that if communication bids during the day and tonight fail we will stop," Interfax news agency quoted ESA's representative in Russia, Rene Pichel, as saying.

Pichel said ESA and the Russians had not had contacts with the probe for more than a week and the instruments and people working to establish contacts should therefore be used for other projects.

"They're mobilising resources that we could use for other projects," he said.

The European [Space](#) Agency's ground station in Perth, Australia had made contact with the probe on November 22, the first sign of life from Phobos-Grunt since it got stuck in Earth's orbit after launch on November 9.

The Perth tracking station had also managed to receive a second signal from the probe.

But ESA said last week further attempts had failed.

On November 24, Russia announced its scientists had for the first time made contact with 13.5-tonne Phobos-Grunt and a signal and some telemetry data had been received.

Phobos-Grunt is Russia's first interplanetary mission since 1996, when an attempt to send an instrument-laden 6.1-tonne probe to the Red Planet, Mars 96, ended with a failure just after launch.

The five-billion-ruble (\$165-million) scout was designed to travel to the [Martian moon](#) of [Phobos](#), scoop up soil and return the sample to Earth by

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APA citation: ESA gives up bids to contact stranded Russian space probe (2011, December 2) retrieved 25 October 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-12-esa-contact-stranded-russian-space.html>

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