

Europe's Vega rocket launch set for early February

9 January 2012



The Vega rocket is seen in Kourou, French Guiana, in 2007. The maiden voyage of Europe's Vega rocket, designed to launch small payloads of about 1.5 tonnes into low-Earth orbit, is set for February 9, the head of the European Space Agency said Monday.

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"The target date for the Vega launch, set with all the partners involved -- Arianespace, industry, other space agencies -- is February 9," ESA's Director General Jean-Jacques Dordain said at a press conference.

The rocket is scheduled to lift the LARES (Laser Relativity Satellite), along with several other micro-satellites, from the Ariane launch site in Kourou, French Guiana.

The ESA had hoped to put the first Vega into space as early as 2009, and in October set a January 30 date for the light rocket's first voyage.

"Goodness knows it is a very difficult campaign. Everything is new," Dordain said, adding that he

was confident the new date would hold.

Bringing Vega on line means that Europe will have completed its three-pronged launch capability.

Heavy-lifter Ariane ES can hoist the 20 tonnes Automated Transfer Vehicle (ATV) supply module to the [International Space Station](#), while the Ariane ECA is designed mainly to lift [communications satellites](#) weighing up to 10 tonnes into geostationary orbit.

The Russian workhorse [Soyuz rocket](#), launched for the first time from the Ariane site in October, carries mid-sized loads.

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