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Ariane 6 to take Europe's launchers to new heights CNES, ESA and ASL confirm development of new launcher

The Ariane 6 programme, approved at the ESA Ministerial Council meeting of 2 December 2014, seeks to halve launch costs per kilogram compared to Ariane 5. CNES has responsibility for developing ground support equipment at the Guiana Space Centre (CSG) and as such is in charge of building the new ELA4 launch complex for Ariane 6. An amendment to the contract of 12 August 2015 was signed today at ESA headquarters in the presence of Thierry Mandon, Secretary of State for Higher Education and Research.

Following the signature on 12 August 2015 of development contracts for Ariane 6 and its new ELA4 launch complex, the detailed definition review was completed in December. To maintain the very ambitious schedule and accommodate inevitable delays due to the rainy season, earthwork was started early in the summer of 2015 and completed at the end of May this year, more than a month ahead of schedule.

CNES issued European invitations to tender for ELA4 this February. Contracts for infrastructures and test rigs were signed in early July, while the contract for core mechanical systems for ELA4, comprising the launch table, P120C transporters, umbilical mast and flame trench, was signed last month.

The contract signed by ESA and CNES on 12 August 2015 covers all work required to complete ELA4 up to delivery to ESA in June 2019. However, ESA had made funding commitments to CNES conditional on the decisions that would be reached at the Programme Implementation Review (PIR) this July. This review confirmed the pursuit of the programme and all of the contracts have thus been firmed up.

That is the purpose of the contract amendment signed today, which will enable CNES to stay on schedule and give notice of key contract awards for low-voltage and security systems, range safety and cryogenic and conventional fluids and process interfaces before the end of the year. As a result, by mid-December more than 60% (in value terms) of industrial contracts will have been secured and consultations with contractors will continue into the first quarter of next year, in particular for adaptations required to facilities at the CSG. Work will then continue into 2018, after which a technical qualification phase of approximately nine months will begin. Handover of the facilities to ESA is scheduled in the second half of 2019 to begin combined tests with the launcher. Ariane 6's first flight is planned in 2020.

After the signature, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall commented: "Ariane 6 is now more than ever on track and set to maintain the world-leading position in the commercial launch services market that Europe has worked so hard to build over the last 35 years. It is also a strong signal that shows the unwavering commitment of governments, agencies and industry to do what it takes to make the development of Ariane 6 a success."

Thierry Mandon declared: "The countdown has started and in 1,500 days' time Ariane 6 will soar skyward from Kourou, symbolizing Europe's independent launch capability and the success of its entire industry."

Contacts

Pascale Bresson
Julien Watelet

Tel. +33 (0)1 44 76 75 39
Tel. +33 (0)1 44 76 78 37

pascale.bresson@cnes.fr
julien.watelet@cnes.fr

presse.cnes.fr