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Four new satellites to join Galileo constellation

One week before the launch of four new satellites for Galileo, the European Union's satellite navigation programme, CNES President and interministerial coordinator for European satellite navigation programmes Jean-Yves Le Gall met the press this morning for a status check on the programme and its future applications.

The Galileo satellite navigation programme, launched by the European Union in 1999, aims to give Europe its own satellite-based positioning and timing system and thus guarantee its independence from current and future positioning systems. The 14 Galileo satellites already in orbit are set to be joined next week by four new satellites sent aloft from the Guiana Space Centre atop an Ariane 5 launcher, taking the constellation to 18 out of the full complement of 26 satellites and paving the way for testing of early services. Two more Ariane 5 launches are planned in 2017 and 2018. With its 30 satellites and 20 ground stations around the globe, Galileo will provide free positioning with metric accuracy and authenticated timing accurate to a few billionths of a second.

As the number of applications relying on satellite navigation is growing exponentially, Galileo is vital to Europe's strategic and economic independence and is going to play a key role in citizens' daily lives. But tomorrow, developing services will be the biggest challenge facing it. Once initial services are operational, Galileo will progressively become a reality for industry and users across a broad range of sectors that include transport, critical infrastructure management requiring precise and reliable timing (banking transactions, electric utilities, etc.), insurance, smartphone app users and developers, surveyors and farmers. Another critical sector will be search and rescue, which will immediately benefit from these initial services and from greater precision over time.

The European Commission has overall responsibility for satellite navigation programmes, relying for programme management on the European Space Agency's expertise in developing and deploying systems, and on GSA, the European GNSS Agency based in Prague, for system operation. In France, satellite navigation programmes are under the responsibility of an interministerial coordinator.

The Toulouse Space Centre (CST) plans and conducts satellite positioning operations in partnership with ESA's European Space Operations Centre (ESOC). CNES is also central to operations for Galileo's Search and Rescue service, which relies on resources at the CST. Lastly, Galileo satellite signals were designed by CNES engineers. One of their unique features is that they are more robust than GPS signals in so-called constrained environments such as urban canyons.

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