

Paris, 30 November 2016
PR217 - 2016

Europe's launchers sector gears up to boost competitiveness

CNES has sold its almost 35% stake in Arianespace to Airbus Safran Launchers, in line with decisions reached at the last ministerial council meeting of the European Space Agency (ESA) at the end of 2014. The new ownership structure has been crafted in response to the request from the agency's member states to reorganize Europe's launcher sector in order to make it more competitive.

With all required consultations and approvals now complete, CNES has sold its almost 35% stake in Arianespace to Airbus Safran Launchers, the industrial prime contractor for Ariane 5 and the future Ariane 6. Already the largest shareholder in Arianespace with approximately 39%, ASL will now hold 74%, effective 31 December 2016.

Commenting on this operation, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall said: "This sale of CNES's holding in Arianespace is a new step forward in the restructuring of Europe's launchers sector decided by ESA's member states and proposed by CNES at the initiative of France. The restructuring hinges on three areas: development of Ariane 6 and Vega-C with a view to halving launch costs per kilogram compared to Ariane 5; support for continued operations of Ariane 5 until Ariane 6 comes on stream; and a simplification of Europe's launchers sector around the three key players that are ESA, CNES and Airbus Safran Launchers. Together, these changes should enable Europe to retain the leadership position it has steadily forged in the commercial launch services market over the last 35 years."

Alain Charmeau, CEO of Airbus Safran Launchers stated : " With the confirmation by the Member States of the European Space Agency of the development of Ariane 6, this change in the shareholder mix at Arianespace finalises the creation of a new launcher governance in Europe. Together, we will be more effective in providing our customers with more efficient solutions and in developing new operational synergies, both for Ariane 5 and for the future Ariane 6", Alain Charmeau, CEO of Airbus Safran Launchers stated. "This change in the shareholder mix enables us to retain all the key factors in the success of Arianespace, which have made it the world leader in launch services, in particular for its freedom of action and its reactivity, allowing it to adapt to the changes of an increasingly competitive market. The governance change also ensures that the roles of the other Arianespace shareholders will be preserved and in addition will benefit the Vega and Soyuz launchers. I would also like to pay tribute to CNES, a key French and European player in independent access to space, whose support and commitment have enabled this major evolution of the governance of space launchers in Europe to take place."

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