

Soyuz completes sixth successful launch from the Guiana Space Centre Places the GAIA astrometry satellite in orbit

Thursday 19 December at 06:12 local time (10:12 CET), Soyuz lifted off from Europe's spaceport at the Guiana Space Centre and 42 minutes later its Fregat upper stage successfully placed the GAIA space telescope into orbit.

GAIA is an astrometry mission of the European Space Agency (ESA) that aims to map our galaxy in three dimensions and to locate and characterize more than a billion stars. The mission's estimated operating lifetime is five years, during which CNES will be making a major contribution in receiving and processing the huge volume of data the satellite is expected to gather.

Built by prime contractor Astrium and weighing 2,034 kilograms at lift-off, GAIA will operate from the L2 Lagrangian point some 1.5 million kilometres from Earth, where its instrument will benefit from stable thermal conditions in a Lissajous-type orbit to avoid eclipses of the Sun by Earth.

On the occasion of this launch, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall underlined this latest accomplishment by Soyuz, its sixth straight success since 2011 from the Guiana Space Centre, stating: "I would like to congratulate all the teams who made this launch a success: those at ESA, Roscosmos, Arianespace, across Europe's and Russia's space industries and of course at CNES, who completed this launch, the 7th this year from the Guiana Space Centre. GAIA is the culmination of an unstinting nine-year effort set to bring a giant leap in our understanding of the Universe, its history and the laws that govern it. This mission is carrying on the work of Hipparcos, launched in 1989, and with GAIA, CNES is entering the era of 'big data' and making a revolutionary shift to a whole new scale of science data processing."

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