

CNES and CNSA give go-ahead for Phase B of SVOM astrophysics mission

CNES and the China National Space Administration (CNSA) have given the go-ahead to start Phase B, the preliminary definition phase, of the SVOM astrophysics mission.

The Chinese and French engineering and science teams working on the SVOM mission (Space-based multiband astronomical Variable Objects Monitor) got together for three days in Shanghai to put the finishing touches to the work plan for Phase B of the project, which aims to arrive at a preliminary definition and select technical solutions over the next two years or so. The French delegation on the SVOM Steering Committee was led by Thierry Duquesne, CNES's Director of Strategy and Programmes.

This decision follows the extension of the SVOM mission agreement signed on Saturday 2 August in Beijing, which stipulates the sharing of responsibilities between CNES and CNSA. CEA, the French atomic energy and alternative energies commission, and CNRS, the French national scientific research centre, will be partnering CNES and playing a key role in development of the French instruments for SVOM.

SVOM is an astrophysics mission designed chiefly to observe and characterize gamma-ray bursts, the highest-energy phenomena in the Universe. China will be responsible for the mission, satellite and bus, and will share responsibility with France for the instruments and ground segment. CNES will oversee the French contribution, consisting of the MXT and ECLAIRs instruments, for which the Toulouse Space Centre (CST) will be prime contractor, and the French elements of the ground segment (MXT and ECLAIRs control centre, data processing centre and alerting antenna network). SVOM is set to be orbited in 2021 by a Chinese launcher.

Commenting on this decision, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall said: "Thanks to CNES's and our Chinese partner's strong commitment to accomplish this important mission within the planned timeframe, SVOM is already on the rails. It illustrates our shared desire to pursue exemplary cooperation in space between France and China, notably in astrophysics."

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