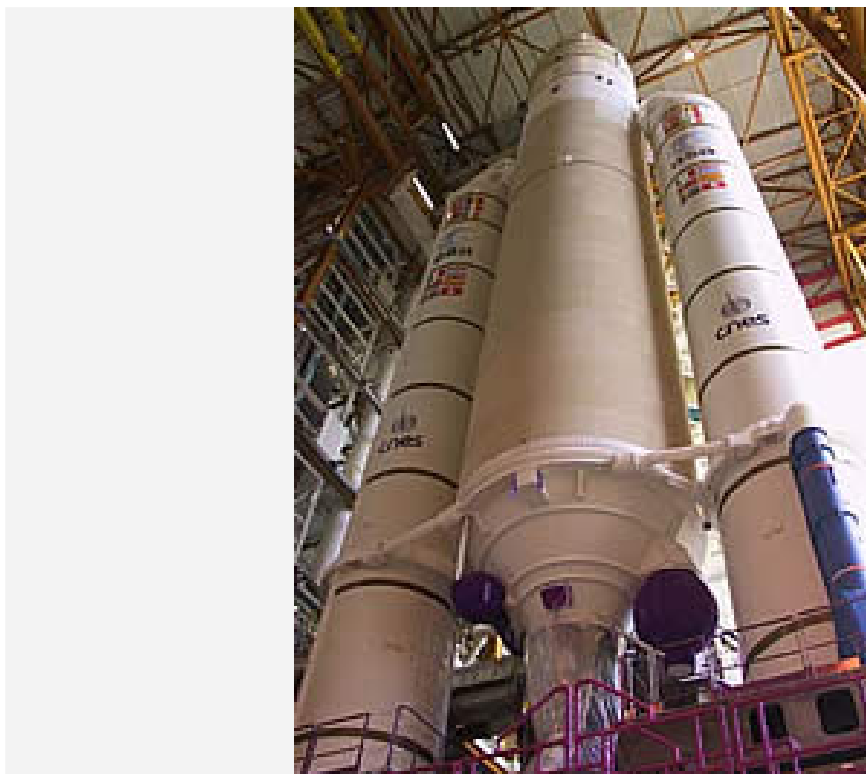

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Europe's most powerful launcher rocket, Ariane 5 ECA, to lift off with two communication satellites

17 February 2006



Ariane 5 ECA in the Integration building at Kourou

First heavy-duty Ariane to be volume-produced - and under new industrial management

Cologne – Europe's most powerful rocket, the Ariane 5 ECA, is waiting on the launchpad at the European spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana, ready for lift-off on Tuesday 21 February 2006. This heavy-duty Ariane rocket is the first to be built as part of the new volume production programme, which is under new industrial management.

This signals the transition of this version of the Ariane 5 into the all-important next phase. Over the last two years, the German Aerospace Center (DLR) has been closely involved in the qualification of Europe's new heavy-duty launcher. One key aspect of DLR's involvement was the many test runs carried out on the adapted Vulcain-2 main engine at DLR Lampoldshausen near Heilbronn.

The Ariane rocket is carrying two telecommunications satellites: HOT BIRD 7A on behalf of French firm Eutelsat, which is destined for commercial use, and SPAINSAT on behalf of Spanish operator Hisdesat, which is intended to provide the Spanish Ministry of Defence with secure telecommunications.

Ariane is due to lift off from Kourou at 23:13 CET on 21 February 2006 with its payload of almost eight tons.

Europe's most powerful rocket

The Ariane 5 ECA (Evolution Cryotechnique Type A) is the most sophisticated and powerful rocket ever built for the European Space Agency (ESA). It is capable of carrying two satellites with a total mass of almost ten tons into geostationary transfer orbit at the same time.

The imminent launch is the first launch of an Ariane 5 rocket to have been built under the full responsibility of the European firm EADS SPACE Transportation. The firm is based in various locations, including Bremen (Germany) and Les Mureaux near Paris. For the first time, the rocket was fully assembled, tested and handed over to Arianespace in Kourou under the guidance of EADS.

First Ariane 5 following restructuring of European launcher industry

The Ariane 5 ECA now waiting on the launch pad is the first of 30 rockets commissioned under the contractual name 'Production Batch PA' at the 2004 International Aerospace Exhibition in Berlin in the presence of the then Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. It was the first occasion on which Arianespace, the company that operates Ariane, had ordered the launcher rockets directly from EADS SPACE Transportation.

In the past, Arianespace had ordered individual components before assembling them in Kourou. This is the outcome of extensive restructuring in the European launcher industry, which received the go-ahead from the ESA's Council of Ministers in Paris in 2003.

The decisions of the Council were aimed at creating one principal industrial contractor for the Ariane launcher system in Europe, the role taken on by EADS SPACE Transportation. This company is represented at four different sites in Germany. Final assembly of the whole first stage of Ariane 5 will take place in Bremen, while the thrust chamber of the five million horsepower Vulcain main engine in the first stage is being manufactured in Ottobrunn near Munich.

The restructuring effort is intended to make European launcher rockets more reliable and more economical, and to guarantee sustainable access to space for Europe. Within this context, the ESA Council of Ministers expressed its continuing support for the European launcher programme in December 2005.

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