

Eight Galileo Satellites in Orbit

The EU's Galileo satellite navigation system now has eight satellites in orbit following the launch of the latest pair. Galileo 7 and 8 lifted off at 21:46 GMT (22:46 CET, 18:46 local time) on 27 March 2015 from Europe's Spaceport in French Guiana on top of a Soyuz rocket.

All the Soyuz stages were completed as planned, with the Fregat upper stage releasing the satellites into their target orbit close to 23,500km altitude, around 3 hours and 48 minutes after lift-off.

Following initial checks, run jointly by ESA and France's CNES space agency from the CNES Toulouse centre, the two satellites will be handed over to the Galileo Control Centre in Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany and the Galileo in-orbit testing facility in Redu, Belgium for testing before they are commissioned for operational service. This is expected in mid-year 2015.

On Track

The new pair will join the six satellites already launched, in October 2011, October 2012 and August 2014. According to Jean-Jacques Dordain, Director General of ESA, the tests in orbit of satellites 5 and 6 have demonstrated the quality and performance of the satellites, and the production of the following ones is well on track. Four more satellites are in testing or final integration and scheduled for launch later this year.

Various Services

As set by the European Commission, the objective is to deliver a package of Initial Services, including a free Public Service, an encrypted Public Regulated Service and a Search And Rescue function, by 2016, to be transferred to the responsibility of the European Global Navigation Satellite Systems Agency, GSA.

A full system capability that includes an encrypted commercial service benefiting from 24 operational satellites and six spares is expected to be in place by 2020.

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