

Two New Satellites Join Galileo Constellation



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 22:46 CET (18:46 local time) on 27 March 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.

The new pair will join the six satellites already launched, in October 2011, October 2012 and August 2014.

Deployment

The deployment of the Galileo constellation is restarting with this successful launch, said 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. This is good news for Galileo, he continued.

Four more satellites are in testing or final integration and scheduled for launch later this year.

With six new satellites expected to be in orbit by year's end, ESA are now approaching the cruise mode of production, testing and deployment of the satellite constellation, said ESA's director of Galileo and navigation-related activities, Didier Faivre.

Initial 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.