



ELA-3 launch control room for Ariane 5 (exterior view). Photo courtesy of Arianespace.

A busy 12 months

The year that has just begun promises to be another busy year for one of the world's leading commercial launch service providers. Satellite Evolution Asia (SEA) reports.

Arianespace is following its strong performance in 2006 with plans for an active mission schedule during the next 12 months, and the company has kicked off its commercial activity with an announcement of the first new launch booking of 2007.

Speaking at Arianespace's traditional New Year's press conference, Jean-Yves Le Gall, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Arianespace said that the company has scheduled six Ariane 5 missions during 2007 from Europe's Spaceport in French Guiana, along with three Soyuz launches by its Starsem affiliate at Kazakhstan's Baikonur Cosmodrome.

"For the New Year, we will build on our successes of 2006, when Arianespace once again delivered on the promises made to its international clients," Le Gall told journalists attending the Paris press briefing. "While some competitors are still practicing price dumping

and are frantically booking satellites they cannot launch, Arianespace maintains the policy of meeting its commitments while offering services at prices that are coherent with the quality it delivers."

Le Gall also detailed Arianespace's first Ariane 5 launch contract of 2007, which has been booked by ProtoStar Ltd. for its ProtoStar I satellite. This is the latest order from a new telecommunications market entrant that has placed its confidence in Arianespace, and the booking marks the two hundred and eightieth contract signed since the company's creation 26 years ago.

Ariane 5's performance in 2006 validated the heavy-lift vehicle's operational maturity, as well as the ability to match up a full range of satellites for its trademark dual-payload missions. Le Gall noted that every Ariane 5 flight last year carried two primary satellite passengers, and all payloads were deployed in highly precise Geostationary Transfer Orbits (GTOs).

"Our clients were extremely pleased with Ariane 5's accuracy and with our ability to launch on time in 2006 – all while orbiting a total of ten satellites and one auxiliary passenger," he added. "This operational performance was welcomed by the industry, which responded by once again making Arianespace its preferred launch services provider – placing a total of 12 new launch contracts with us during the year."

Le Gall said 2006 also saw key developments for the other two members of Arianespace's growing commercial launcher family: Soyuz and Vega. The two Soyuz missions performed by its Starsem



affiliate last year utilized improved versions of Russia's tried-and-trusted medium-lift workhorse, setting the stage for a 2008 introduction of Soyuz at the Spaceport in French Guiana. Additionally, the static test firing of Vega's first stage engine in November was a key milestone for this lightweight launch vehicle, which will be operated by Arianespace after its maiden flight in 2008 from the Spaceport.

Arianespace's 2007 launch activity will start with an Ariane 5 mission that underscores the diversity of its customer base – which today covers the world's five continents. This initial flight of the year will loft the UK's Skynet 5A military relay satellite and the INSAT 4B telecommunications platform for India.

Ariane 5 launches in 2007 are to include five that carry dual-satellite payloads, along with a dedicated flight to loft Europe's large Automated Transfer Vehicle (ATV) for servicing of the International Space Station (ISS).

"The Ariane 5 ATV mission will be the launcher's first for the ISS, and this is a very important milestone for us," Le Gall said. "I recently met the director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in Washington, D.C., and it is clear that Ariane 5 is a truly capable vehicle for the support of the ISS."

2007 activity for Arianespace's Starsem affiliate will involve three Soyuz missions from Baikonur Cosmodrome, two of which will carry clusters of four satellites each for the Globalstar telecommunications constellation.

In concluding his near-term outlook at the press conference, Le Gall said that the next 12 months will see a continuation of preparations for the future arrival of both Soyuz and Vega at Europe's Spaceport in French Guiana. Creation of the new Soyuz launch infrastructure is now well advanced, and initial work is underway on the Vega launch site.

"With Arianespace's launcher family strategy and the prospect of sustained operations for years to come, the Spaceport is fast becoming the world's preferred launch base," Le Gall concluded. "We are on track for our objective of providing a rate of approximately ten missions annually from French Guiana starting in 2010, composed of an average seven flights per year with Ariane 5, plus two Soyuz missions and a Vega launch." ■

Arianespace to launch ProtoStar I

Arianespace will launch the ProtoStar I satellite for ProtoStar Ltd., making it the two-hundred-and-eightieth contract won by Arianespace since its inception in March 1980.

ProtoStar I will be placed into geostationary transfer orbit by an Ariane 5 from the Guiana Space Center, Europe's Spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana, during the first half of 2008.

Weighing in at 4,100kg, ProtoStar I is a Space Systems/Loral (SS/L) 1300 platform, built in Palo Alto, California and will be the thirty-fourth platform built by SS/L to be launched by Arianespace. The satellite will be equipped with 22 Ku-band 36MHz equivalent and 38 C-band 36MHz equivalent transponders, and will provide digital DTH services, HDTV and Broadband Internet to underserved areas in Asia.

"We are honoured to be a part of this new venture. Protostar has exhibited remarkable vision with its plan for bringing DTH satellite coverage to Asia, and Arianespace stands-ready to launch this vision, literally and figuratively," said Jean-Yves Le Gall, Arianespace Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

"ProtoStar sought a launch services provider that has a proven track record and we have found that in Arianespace. We are excited to partner with a company that has a great deal of experience in working with new ventures like ProtoStar," said Philip Father, President and CEO of ProtoStar.

Arianespace in 2006

In 2006, Arianespace successfully launched five Ariane 5 ECAs, placing ten communications satellites and one technology experiment into Geostationary Transfer Orbit (GTO).

With 30 successful launches, including 16 in a row, Europe's Ariane 5 launcher has amply proven its technical maturity. Ariane 5 is the only commercial launcher now on the market capable of launching two payloads at once, thereby delivering greater performance, flexibility and competitiveness to all customers.

On 13 October, Starsem carried out a successful launch from Baikonur, using a Soyuz 2-1a to loft the first operational weather satellite in polar orbit, Metop-A, for the intergovernmental organisation Eumetsat. On 27 December, Arianespace and Starsem used a Soyuz 2-1b to successfully launch the Corot stellar observation satellite, also from Baikonur, for French space agency CNES.

A thriving year

In 2006, Arianespace once again confirmed its leading role in launch Service & Solutions, as it signed 12 new satellite launch contracts: Arabsat (two contracts), GMS (two contracts), COMS-1, Helios 2B, Superbird 7, TerreStar I, Turksat 1R, Vinasat 1, W2M and one confidential payload.

Since being founded, Arianespace has signed 280 launch contracts with 65 international operators. Starsem has signed 22 contracts. Nearly two-thirds of the satellites in orbit today were launched by Arianespace.

Arianespace has a backlog of 38 satellites to be launched, while Starsem has five.

Sales in line with forecasts

Arianespace will post sales of approximately 985 million euros in 2006, with income once again at the break-even point. Starsem had sales of about 70 million euros, and income was also at the break-even point.



Spaceport technical center (with Ariane 5 full-scale model). Photo courtesy of Arianespace.