



9 April 1968 – 9 April 2018 : 50th anniversary of first launch from the Guiana Space Centre, Europe's spaceport

Published on Monday April 9, 2018

View online : <https://www.france-science.org/9-April-1968-9-April-2018-50th.html>

Monday 9 April in Kourou, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall led the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the first launch from the Guiana Space Centre. It was on 9 April 1968 that the Véronique sounding rocket, France's first launcher, soared skywards from Europe's spaceport. The pioneers of this great adventure and several former directors of the space centre were present at today's event.

France's first steps in the conquest of space were motivated by a strong national ambition driven by President Charles de Gaulle. Work on the future space base in French Guiana got underway in September 1965 following the government's decision to locate it there on 14 April 1964. In 1973, ten European nations decided to create the European Space Agency (ESA) and begin development of a satellite launcher called Ariane. With the maiden flight of Ariane 1 on 24 December 1979, Europe acquired an independent launch capability that would enable it to garner a significant share of the launch services market.

Today, the Ariane family of vehicles has logged 242 successful launches and the latest vehicle in the series, Ariane 6, is in development. CNES will have completed construction of this new vehicle's launch pad by 2019 in time to start testing. The launch base in French Guiana is tasked with a range of missions serving Europe's space transportation goals. These include guaranteeing Europe's independent access to space, maintaining a leading position in the world launch services market and sustaining its industry's workload and expertise.

In French Guiana, CNES is the owner of the launch base and a key driver of the region's economic and social development, notably through its agreement with the French government and the French Guiana regional authority (CTG). Alongside its space programmes, the agency has worked over the last 50 years to engage and inspire younger generations through space activities and applications, and to promote space as a tool for outreach and learning.

On this commemorative occasion, Jean-Yves Le Gall commented: *"The Guiana Space Centre is a fantastic technological, industrial and commercial success. For 50 years now, this great human adventure has brought together representatives of the space community from every continent and the people of French Guiana have put their region on the world space map. Through successive launches of Ariane, Soyuz and Vega, we are demonstrating this base's excellent performance every day, and its 50-year legacy is a fine example of what Europe can do when it is strong and united."*