

Glonass Satellite Launch Successful

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The Space Forces successfully launched on Saturday one of the final satellites needed to complete the space-based Glonass navigation system that Moscow hopes will challenge the dominant U.S. Global Positioning System.

The satellite, Glonass-K, which was launched shortly after 6 a.m. local time in Plesetsk, reached orbit, said Alexei Zolotukhin, a spokesman for the Defense Ministry's Space Forces.

The entry of the spacecraft into space "went according to plan. Steady telemetric communications have been established with the spacecraft," he said.

After the embarrassing loss of three satellites last year, two more are expected to be launched in 2011 to complete the \$2 billion project that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has said will give Russia "satellite navigation sovereignty." The last two Plesetsk launches have been penciled in for July and October, Interfax reported.

Moscow is hoping the navigation technology Glonass will create a revolution in domestic consumer technology, with applications expected to be used in mobile telephones and automobiles.

Three Glonass satellites launched in December last year veered off course and crashed into the Pacific Ocean near Hawaii, costing Moscow about \$160 million and setting the program back an estimated six months.

Without Glonass, Russia's military fears that it is at the mercy of the United States, which it says could block or blur its GPS signal in a time of crisis — allegations which were rife during a brief 2008 war between Georgia and Russia.

(Reuters, MT)

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