

Proton-M Rockets Cleared to Fly to Space

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The sun rising above Earth in a photo taken aboard the ISS on Saturday.

MOSCOW — The Federal Space Agency gave the green light on Tuesday to resume launches of the main rocket it uses for carrying satellites into space after determining what caused a launch to fail this month.

The agency suspended the use of Proton-M rockets last week after the failed launch on Aug. 18, which put the \$265 million Express-AM4 communications satellite into the wrong orbit.

An investigative commission said a problem with a part of the rocket's Briz-M booster stage had caused the rocket to lose its orientation, the Federal Space Agency said in a statement on its web site, roscosmos.ru.

"As a result of the commission's work, the ban on preparations for launches of Proton-M rockets with Briz-M boosters has been lifted," it said, adding that recommended repairs would be made before future launches.

The agency will draft a new schedule for launches for the rest of 2011. Before the failure, 10 more launches of the Proton-M, Russia's principal rocket for heavy commercial and military satellites, had been scheduled by the end of the year.

A week after the loss of the Express-AM4, billed by its makers EADS as the most powerful satellite ever built in Europe, an unmanned Russian supply craft also failed, upsetting the supply schedule of the manned International Space Station.

The Progress craft, which was meant to deliver fuel, food and other supplies to the station and its six-member crew of Russian, American and Japanese astronauts, burned up in the atmosphere soon after it was launched on Aug. 24.

The Federal Space Agency said Monday that the return of three crew to Earth, set for Sept. 8, would be postponed by about a week, and the next manned mission to the orbital station would be delayed by at least a month from its scheduled date of Sept. 22.

Any further delays could force space officials to leave the station, a \$100 billion project of 16 nations built mostly by the United States and Russia, unmanned for the first time since 2000, when the first live-aboard crew arrived.

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