

Russian Space Station Module Delivery Delayed Again

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Training mock-up of the Nauka module at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center outside Moscow.

Special report for MT

A significant contribution to the International Space Station, Russia's Nauka Multipurpose Laboratory Module, will not be delivered to the orbital outpost before 2017, nearly 10 years past its intended launch date.

Engineers at RSC Energia — the Russian state-owned company responsible for building Russia's manned space vehicles — were working on the module when they discovered debris in the engines, Interfax reported on Monday, citing a source in the Russian space industry. The model was scheduled for flight this year.

The Council of Chief Designers, a senior body of Russian engineers responsible for the Russian segment of ISS, has concluded that the extensive nature of the repair and recertification

process all but rule out the delivery of the module to the space station prior to 2017.

Federal Space Agency chief Oleg Ostapenko said that a meeting will be held at the end of May to finalize the repair plans for the module, but added that it is "too early to talk about timing," Interfax reported.

The delay marks the latest development in the ongoing saga of the module, designated Nauka — the Russian word for science. Although the current design for the module was finalized in 2004 and slated for launch in 2007, a series of setbacks over the years had pushed the module's flight back to 2014.

The module includes a propulsion system to help control the of the station, provide additional storage space and fuel tanks and would add extra parking space for the Soyuz and Progress spacecraft that routinely ferry crews and cargo to the orbiting outpost.

The ongoing difficulties faced by Nauka also present questions regarding the fate of a long awaiting European contribution to ISS — the European Robotic Arm — which was designed to be fitted on the exterior of the module.

The arm has been completed and awaiting launch since 2005, pending the delivery of Nauka to the space station.

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