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Soyuz Rocket Builder Ready To Abandon Ukrainian Components

By The Moscow Times

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Russia's TsSKB-Progress space center, the builder of the famous Soyuz rocket used to transport astronauts and cosmonauts to the International Space Station, or ISS, has said that it is ready to stop production of certain components in Ukraine and transfer manufacture to a facility in Russia, officials from the center said.

"We are now, in principle, ready to transfer completely to Russian production on the rocket," the company's chief technician, Valery Kapitonov, said in comments published on the website of the Russian Engineering Union.

The older Soyuz rockets that are used to support the ISS program rely on a Ukrainian control system, among other things — a relic of the rocket family's Soviet heritage that in the aftermath of Russia's seizure of Crimea from Ukraine in March looks like a threat to Russia's space program. The rockets are based on the same core design that launched Sputnik and Yury Gagarin into space at the dawn of the space age.

Progress is currently working on phasing out the older Soyuz-U and Soyuz-FG rockets in favor of the newer Soyuz 2.1a and 2.1b models, which feature more powerful engines and a fully digital flight control system of Russian design.

Alexander Kirilin, head of TsSKB-Progress, said that the machines used to manufacture the rockets are not dependent on foreign equipment, making the transfer quite easy, the statement said.

In July, the Federal Space Agency, or Roscosmos estimated that the complete substitution of Ukrainian space imports would take about two years and cost 33 billion rubles ($911 million), so progress appears to be ahead of the curve.

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