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Russia May Ditch Ukrainian Space Rockets for Domestically Produced Soyuz

By The Moscow Times

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Russia may replace two Ukrainian space rockets with the newest version of its venerable Soyuz flagship rocket, the CEO of the company that builds Soyuz told the TASS news agency Friday.

"The decision on the possible replacement of these rockets with the Soyuz 2.1B could be made upon the completion of its flight tests," said Alexander Kirilin, general director of the Progress Rocket and Space Center in Samara was quoted as saying. The latest upgrades must pass four test launches before being deemed successful.

The new rocket would replace the light Rokot and Dnepr rockets — old Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles converted in cooperation with Ukraine's space industry to serve as commercial space rockets.

The Soyuz 2.1B flew its first flight in late 2013, but no additional launches have taken place since then. A flight certification process takes five successful launches, and the first of the four remaining launches is scheduled for sometime this summer.

Russia-Ukraine space industry cooperation has suffered amid the crisis in Ukraine, which saw Kiev institute a ban on military-industrial cooperation with Russia last year.

The supplier of the control system for Rokot was a military firm in Kharkiv, Ukraine, prompting space officials to look for alternatives means of achieving light payload launches.

Russian Soyuz 2.1A rockets, the previous iteration of the Soyuz 2, have already proven themselves to be reliable, and are exported to the French space launch company Arianespace for commercial launches from the European Space Agency (ESA) spaceport in South America.

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