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Private Russian Airline Gets Green Light For Space Launch

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Federal Space Agency

Russia's largest private airline, S7, has been given a license to begin operations in outer space. The Novosibirsk-based holding company plans its first-ever rocket launch from Kazakhstan sometime this year.

The launch will be conducted by a subsidiary, S7 Space Transport Systems, which holds the Russian government license. It is one of over 1,000 companies licensed to either produce or operate space hardware — a strictly regulated military and civilian industry.

S7 waded into the budding private space industry last year with the purchase of a mothballed floating launch platform known as Sea Launch. The platform was built as a joint project between U.S. aerospace giant Boeing, Russia's Energia and Ukraine's Yuzhmash.

Related article: Russia's S7 Takes a Giant Leap Into Space

The project was suspended in 2014 as several launch failures and supply concerns due to the Ukraine crisis hampered Sea Launch's efforts. The state-owned Energia company landed with a majority share, and the Russian government was unsure what to do with the platform.

S7 emerged as the surprise buyer of the platform, promising to return it to operations and use it as a platform that S7 owner Vladislav Filyov could use to join the ranks of Western entrepreneurs Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos in a high-stakes commercial space race.

The company says it plans its first launch of a Ukrainian-Russian Zenit-M rocket — similar to the ones used by Sea Launch — from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan by year's end. The launch is meant to work out kinks in operations before rebooting the Sea Launch platform.

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