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Russia Finds Defects in Mars, Telecom Rockets – Vedomosti

March 11, 2020

The latest revelation follows a series of Proton blunders that threw the reliability of the Russian space industry into question. **Mikhail Dzhaparidze / TASS**

Russia has detected defective parts in its Proton-M rockets that were set to launch Europe's first rover on Mars and two communications satellites, the Vedomosti business daily reported Wednesday.

The launch of Russia's Express 80 and Express 103 satellites on one Proton-M rocket has now been rescheduled for late May instead of March due to the defective parts, the Khrunichev Space Center which builds the rockets announced Tuesday. Another Proton-M is still reportedly due to carry the Russian-European ExoMars-2020 rover to Mars in July.

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Both Proton-Ms were revealed to contain defective bolts which made the rockets less durable, Vedomosti cited an unnamed source at Khrunichev as saying.

The latest revelation follows a series of Proton launch failures over the past decade and the discovery of 71 defective Proton rocket engines in 2016. The blunders threw the reliability of the Russian space industry into question.

Vedomosti's source said that the Roscosmos space agency's 450-million-ruble ($7.2 million) quality control inspection program for 2019-22 has helped avoid potential tragedies with the launches of flawed rockets.

The ExoMars mission is still expected to launch this July because the defective parts should be replaced within 45 days, according to Vedomosti.

Khrunichev announced Tuesday that it formed a special commission to find and punish those responsible for the flaw.

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