
Russian space industry in Berlin : remembering the future

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MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti political commentator Andrei Kislyakov) - The Russian displays at the ILA-2008 International Aerospace Exhibition, held in Berlin from May 27 to June 1, can be described as epoch-making.

And it is not due to the space they occupied or the names present, such as Energia, the Khrunichev Center, Progress, Energomash, Lavochkin association, and others. Should Russia's Federal Space Agency (Roscosmos) implement even some of the programs made public in Berlin, the Russian space industry would be in for a resounding triumph and a return to its former greatness.

Russia could, moreover, become a supplier, not only of a limited number of long established rocket engines, but also of up-to-date satellite systems.

But let us begin with a press release by Roscosmos chief, Anatoly Perminov, distributed at ILA-2008.

Its message is that Russia should lead in a variety of sectors of the international launch services market. The reference is above all to launch vehicles and all types of satellites.

"Russia's rocket and space industry occupies a considerable place in the global production of space equipment (8% in real terms). Its share in the market segment concerned with the production of spacecraft can be increased both by opening its domestic market and by entering other markets," he wrote.

"The main objective of the space industry's international strategy is to stay competitive in traditional markets; in particular, to maintain its leading position in commercial launch services (30%) and to expand its presence in the manufacture of commercial spacecraft," stated the release.

The outlook providing for more profits and returns for the country's economy is clear. But if you feel a doubt nagging at the back of your mind, it is probably the gap between today's achievements and these bright future prospects.

Take the launch services market. Last year, Russia again led the world for the number of launches. Its rockets took off 26 times, accounting for 38% of the world's total. Nine of these carried foreign payloads under commercial programs.

In 2005 and 2006, Russia also led the world in the overall number of launches, including commercial ones. Statistics available for 2005 show that the profits from them were not shared equally among the participants. The biggest beneficiary was Europe, which earned \$490 million from five Ariane-5 launches, followed by Russia (with \$350 million from eight launches); the international Sea Launch Project (\$280 million from four launches); and the United States (\$70 million). Even adding Energia's 25% stake in Sea Launch, Russia remained second.

The picture is unlikely to have changed in the past few years.

But dismissing possible miscalculations and speaking only of hardware, the potential for catching up with and overtaking Europe's Arianespace is there.

Hopefully, it will not be too long before Russia begins building several new launch vehicles developed at the Khrunichev Center under its Angara program. In Berlin, Alexander Kirillin, head of Samara's Progress Rocket Design Bureau, said his company is expanding the range of famed Soyuz launch vehicles.

In addition to medium-class and Soyuz-2 rockets for increased payloads designed to be launched from the international Kourou Space Center, there are plans to build light-weight Soyuz-1 vehicles for placing payloads in lower orbits.

"These environmentally friendly, reliable and relatively low-cost vehicles will be launched from existing facilities," Kirillin said. He thinks the low-orbit launch market is among the fastest developing today and accounts for a 15% to 18% niche in the payload spectrum around the world.

So, should the Angara and Soyuz-1 programs be realized, Russia will have all types of modern launch vehicles available in the rocket services market.

Turning from rockets to satellites, Russia's present craft are not GLONASS navigation system satellites do not last longer than five years. In fact, the short life span of the orbiting fleet is the main obstacle to GLONASS's proper functioning for Russia's Armed Forces.

That situation is set to improve radically, judging by the displays shown by ISS, a company making information satellite systems. In addition to the new GLONASS-M satellite, which is already in production and has a service life of over seven years, ISS showed a forward-looking satellite model, mounted on the non-airtight GLONASS-K platform, with an estimated lifespan of over 10 years.

ISS also displayed replicas of the latest Express-AM44 communications and direct TV satellite and the Luch-5A repeater satellite. Both are being developed in tandem with the European company Thales Alenia Space.

In April of this year, ISS and Alenia signed a memorandum to supply Russian-made parts for European spacecraft. "While yesterday we bought a complete payload from our European partner, and today partly produce and assemble it in Russia, tomorrow we will supply individual satellite elements to the West," ISS director general Nikolai Testoyedov said.

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