

First Pléiades Neo constellation satellite safely delivered in orbit

Start of a new era for Airbus and geospatial applications

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Toulouse, 29 April 2021 – The first satellite of the Pléiades Neo constellation was safely delivered in orbit by Arianespace's European launcher Vega, from French Guiana last night.

First telemetry signals were received this morning and the solar arrays are deployed. The early orbit phase activities have started, commanded from Airbus control centre in Toulouse, to prepare acquisition of first image next week. In-orbit calibration phase will follow before opening commercial service.

Entirely funded, designed, manufactured, owned and operated by Airbus, Pléiades Neo will provide commercial and institutional customers with high-level insights for the next decade. Each satellite will add half a million km² per day at 30cm native resolution. The images will be easily accessible on Airbus' OneAtlas digital platform, allowing customers immediate access to both freshly acquired and archive data, as well as extensive analytics.

Comprising four identical satellites, the Pléiades Neo constellation will work hand in hand with the existing Pléiades satellites and the rest of the dozen-strong Airbus Earth observation satellite fleet. The highly compact Pléiades Neo spacecraft have a light weight, next generation silicon carbide optical instrument, building on the technology that Airbus first pioneered in the early 2000s. They also have inter-satellite links with SpaceDataHighway (EDRS) geostationary satellites to enable urgent acquisitions 30 to 40 minutes following the tasking request to swiftly respond to the most critical situations.

“The launch of this first Pléiades Neo satellite will pave the way to new services and great opportunities for our customers, thanks to its high accuracy and increased reactivity. The Pléiades Neo constellation will definitively boost the 30cm imagery market, bringing a lot of innovation and coverage capacity to the commercial and governmental end-users,” said François Lombard, Head of Intelligence at Airbus Defence and Space.

The satellite will soon be joined by its twin, Pléiades Neo 4, already in Kourou and ready for launch this summer, also on a Vega rocket.

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Pléiades Neo 3 getting ready for launch on Vega in Kourou – ©2021 ESA-CNES-Arianespace

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