

Ariane-6 launches CSO-3: double success for France and Europe

Kourou, French Guiana, 06 March 2025 – The Airbus-built CSO-3 (Composante Spatiale Optique) Earth observation satellite for the French Armed Forces, has been successfully launched by Arianespace on Ariane 6's first commercial flight from the European Spaceport in Kourou.

Alain Fauré, Head of Space Systems at Airbus said: "With each CSO satellite, there may be a new team but the same goal of serving our government customers remains: to provide the best resolution with an agile and secure network. All this, for the intelligence, autonomy and security of our nation. CSO-3 is a perfect illustration of what Airbus and the French space industry can do for France and Europe. It is also a great example of what Europe can do when teaming up!"

CSO-3 is the third of the three-satellite CSO fleet, which will provide extremely high resolution geo-information intelligence to the French Armed Forces and its partners as part of the MUSIS programme (Multinational Space-based Imaging System for surveillance, reconnaissance and observation).

As prime contractor for the CSO satellite programme, Airbus has provided the agile platform and avionics, and was also responsible for integration and testing, and final delivery of the satellite to the French Space Agency, CNES. Thales Alenia Space provided Airbus with the very-high resolution optical instrument.

Airbus teams also developed directly for the DGA, the customised and dynamic User Ground Segment on behalf of the French Defence Procurement Agency (DGA) to the benefit of the French Space Command (CDE), which enables confidential distribution and sharing of information for France and its partners from several European states.

Lionel Suchet, CEO of CNES said: "I am delighted with the successful launch of CSO-3, a satellite serving French defense on behalf of CNES and DGA, built by Airbus Defence and Space in collaboration with Thales Alenia Space. The success of this launch, on Ariane 6's first commercial mission, is excellent news on several counts, and testifies to European and French excellence in the space sector, in the service of our citizens. With the launch of this third CSO satellite, CNES is providing operational support to the French Ministry of the Armed Forces in its drive to renew its space capabilities. I'd like to congratulate all the teams who helped make this launch a success, whether they were involved in preparing the satellite or in bringing this first Ariane 6 commercial mission to a successful conclusion".

The CSO satellites are equipped with a very agile pointing system for highly effective image acquisition and are controlled via a secure ground control operations centre. The fleet offers 3D and very high resolution imaging capability, in visible and infrared bandwidths, enabling acquisition during night and day and maximizing operational use.

The CSO-3 satellite, identical to CSO-1 and 2, will complement the reconnaissance operations of CSO-1 with amplified coverage and revisit capability over large zones at an altitude of

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800km. Flying at a lower altitude, CSO-2's focus is on identification, delivering much higher resolution image quality and precision analytics.

The satellite's tremendous agility and stability enable it to quickly provide users with extremely high-quality images from the Thales Alenia Space instrument, even for the most complex acquisition schedules.

Airbus was awarded the CSO contract at the end of 2010, by CNES, acting on behalf of the French Defence Procurement Agency, DGA. The contract included an option for a third satellite, which was activated after Germany joined the programme in 2015.

The success of this Ariane 6 launch has also been made possible thanks to Airbus employees in Spain and the Netherlands, who contribute to each Ariane 6 launcher, including from Spain large carbon fibre structures (interstage structures, launch vehicle adapter and top of the solid boosters) as well as the electronics and 90% of the wiring. From the Netherlands, the engine thrust frames for the Vulcain 2.1 and Vinci engines are provided.

The MUSIS programme

In 2010, in the absence of an agreement on the European MUSIS initiative to replace existing systems (the French Hélios and Pléiades optical systems, and the German and Italian SAR-Lupe and Cosmo-SkyMed radar systems) and in order to reduce the risk of capability gap at the end of Hélios II's life, France launched a national programme also called MUSIS, led by the DGA. Since then, eight countries have joined the CSO community through bilateral cooperation agreements: Germany (2015), Sweden (2015), Belgium (2017), Italy (2019), Spain (2021), Switzerland (2023), Poland (2024) and Greece (2024).

This programme includes three optical space components (CSO) satellites, a Mission Ground Segment, and an User Ground Segment allowing access to German SARah satellites and the realization of the CIL allowing access to Italian CSG satellites. These resources provide situational awareness and strategic intelligence capabilities, as well as support for crisis prevention and anticipation, and for the planning and conduct of operations.

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The CSO-3 satellite in the Airbus cleanroom - Copyright Airbus

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