

# Delayed Launches Russia's Fault, Kazakh Official Says

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A Zenit-2SB rocket launching from Baikonur in November, carrying the unmanned Fobos-Grunt probe **Oleg Urusov**

The Federal Space Agency is to blame for delays affecting a series of rocket launches from Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome, a Kazakh space official told a news conference Thursday.

Russia and Kazakhstan are yet to sign a new agreement formalizing the terms of rocket launches from Baikonur, a launchpad in southern Kazakhstan which has served as the main base for Moscow's space missions since the Soviet era.

With the agreement unsigned, a string of recent launches have been grounded, including a European meteorological satellite known as MetOp-B as well as Belarussian, German and Canadian satellites, all of which rely on Russian rockets.

According to Talgat Musabayev, head of the Kazakh Space Agency, Kazakh authorities sent the necessary paperwork to Moscow two years ago, but received no response for more than

a year.

"For 1 1/2 years the agreement lay there in Russia, and just one month ago it was sent back with significant changes. Now we have to reach an agreement from scratch. This is a huge task," Musabayev said, RIA-Novosti reported.

In accordance with Kazakh law, both sides must also settle on a location for the fuel and parts jettisoned by rockets launched from Kazakh territory to fall.

Settling on such a location requires an international agreement, which then needs to be ratified by the country's parliament before launches can begin.

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