

Russia to Launch Fleet of Mini Satellites in June

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia will launch a cluster of about three dozen mini-satellites aboard a converted Soviet ICBM in late June as part of a Russian-Ukrainian joint project, contrary to reports that the crisis in Ukraine had jeopardized the program, a top space official said.

The satellites will be launched from a RS-20 Intercontinental Ballistic Missile, or ICBM, that has been converted into a Dnepr rocket. The Moscow-based Kosmotras International Space Company sells these rockets for commercial launches under a 1997 project by the Russian and Ukrainian governments to convert Soviet-era missiles for commercial and scientific purposes.

Earlier Russian media reports said that Ukrainian enterprises — such as Yuzhmash, which converts the missiles — could stop working with their Russian counterparts due to the ongoing crisis in east of the country.

On Wednesday Sergei Ponomaryov, deputy head of the Russian space agency, dismissed these concerns, saying that Ukrainian companies have continued to fulfill their contracts, Itar-Tass reported.

He warned, however, that Moscow could fill the void left by Ukrainian enterprises within two to three months.

If Ukraine pulls out of the Dnepr program, missile conversion could be handled by the Makeyev Rocket Design Bureau, a state-run entity that builds Russia's submarine launched ICBMs.

This year, the Dnepr rocket is set to launch more than 34 mini-satellites — which are typically single-purpose machines that are cheap to make and easy to replace.

Yuzhmash is involved in a number of cooperative projects with the Russian space industry, not just the Dnepr project. It builds Zenit rockets for Sea Launch using a large proportion of components imported from Russia.

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