Vega, Europe’s new small launcher, is in its final development phase, with a qualification flight planned for November 2009. The Vega Research and Technology Accompaniment (VERTA) programme started in 2006 and the first period runs until 2010.

What is proposed?

The VERTA programme has three main components:
- Procurement of five launches (VERTA demonstration flights),
- Customer Service Improvement activities,
- Production accompaniment and technological activities.

The objective of the VERTA flights is to demonstrate the flexibility of the Vega launch system to the space community. The five launches, in 2010–2012, will carry several ESA missions such as ADM-Aeolus, Swarm, LISA Pathfinder and the Intermediate eXperimental Vehicle of the Future Launcher Preparatory Programme. The main Customer Service Improvement activity is the development of the multiple-payload launch capability for Vega.

The first period includes a contribution to the implementation of the five VERTA flights and minimal accompaniment activities, tailored to the financial resources made available by the participating states.

In order to maximise the knowledge and experience gained during Vega’s initial exploitation phase and ensure that the launch system is maintained in qualified status, it is proposed to extend the current VERTA programme for the period 2011–2012.
Why is it needed now?

During the initial exploitation phase of a new launch system, the accompaniment activities (for both flight and ground segments) required to maintain flight qualification of the launch system are at their maximum level.

Extending VERTA beyond the currently approved period is necessary in order to:
- complete the Vega learning phase,
- extend the ESA user base for Vega launches by consolidating the qualification domain of the launcher,
- contribute to the enhanced use of Vega by European institutional customers,
- maintain the qualification status of the Vega launch system, and
- prepare Vega evolution decisions.

The proposed VERTA extension consists of reinforced accompaniment activities for the period 2011–2012 as follows:
- Activities related to the launcher flight hardware (sampling and testing, flight analysis, investigating flight hardware anomalies, and dealing with component obsolescence), scaled to take into account the Vega learning phase, as well as specific development activities to support the initial launcher exploitation;
- A contribution to keep the ESA-owned Vega exploitation facilities in operational condition;
- Launcher system and solid propulsion activities in anticipation of a Vega evolution development decision around 2011.

How will it be done?

What are the benefits?

The operational Vega launch system will be a fundamental element of independent European access to space. By ensuring that all the lessons learned during Vega’s initial operations phase are properly treated, the VERTA extension will optimise Europe’s non-dependence and competitiveness in this vital technical arena.