



AVIO TO LAUNCH SMILE SATELLITE ON APRIL 9th 2026 ON VEGA-C

Colleferro (Rome) March 20th 2026 - On April 9th at 03.29 AM local time (06.29 UTC; 08.29 AM CEST), Avio will launch the European Space Agency's (ESA) and Chinese Academy of Science (CAS) *Solar wind Magnetosphere Ionosphere Link Explorer (Smile)* scientific satellite. The mission, designated "VV29", will be carried out by a Vega-C launcher, the first operated by Avio, lifting off from the European Spaceport in French Guiana.

Smile will be released into a circular orbit at an altitude of 700 km for a mission to a high inclination highly elliptical orbit with an apogee of 121.000 km and a perigee of 5000 km. The planned Smile separation time is about 57 minutes.

The satellite will measure the solar wind and its dynamic interactions with the Earth's magnetosphere, enhancing our understanding of the connection between the Sun and the Earth. Smile weighs 2,250 kilograms.

With this launch, Avio reaffirms its key role in supporting ESA's scientific missions.

VV29 launch at a glance

- First Vega-C flight operated by Avio;
- First Vega-C launch in 2026;
- Second ESA scientific mission placed into orbit by Vega-C;
- Seventh Vega-C flight overall.

Avio is a leading international group engaged in the manufacturing and development of space launchers and solid, liquid and cryogenic propulsion systems. The experience and know-how built up over more than 50 years puts Avio at the cutting-edge of the space launcher sector and defense program. Avio is present in Italy, France, United States and French Guiana, employing more than 1,500 highly qualified personnel. Avio is the prime contractor for the Vega program and a sub-contractor for the Ariane program, as well as a leading solid rocket motor subcontractor for the design and manufacturing of major European tactical missile programs.

For further information

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