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A NEW PUBLIC-PRIVATE BRAZILIAN PROGRAM FOR SMALL SATELLITE LAUNCHER

Abstract

Despite the success of VSB-30, an internationally recognized Brazilian aerospace product, and decades of investment, Brazilian Space Access segment of the national Space Program lacks a case that truly reflects the magnitude of Brazil's potential in developing solutions for launching small satellites into low orbit, especially because of the strategic launch facilities in Alcântara, located in Brazilian state of Maranhão.

To address this gap, Brazilian government initiated the VLPP program in 2024. VLPP, a Portuguese acronym for Small Size Launcher Vehicle, is a collaborative program between the public and private sectors for construction and operation of launcher vehicles. VLPP program adopts an innovative institutional arrangement, wherein all contractors are private companies in a consortium. This approach aims to create a flexible and efficient allocation of resources, avoiding the strict rules of governmental procurement in Brazil. Two separate consortiums will compete, receiving a similar amount of investment. VLPP program enjoys institutional support from Brazilian agencies, including those with extensive knowledge in the field developed over the past years. The government has demonstrated commitment through significant investment, and a tight three-year schedule is set for the development and qualification of the vehicle.

This paper seeks to elucidate the origins of VLPP program, its conceptualization, and institutional arrangement supporting the private sector partners. Signed during a period of governmental transition, it is crucial to underscore the political factors influencing this government's decision to allocate nearly US\$80M, a non-standard investment in the sector over the past decade. Additionally, the paper examines the sustainability of VLPP initiative in the eyes of public state.

From a private perspective, the paper presents a risk analysis surrounding VLPP program and technical backgrounds of each consortium involved in this mission. Furthermore, it analyzes the business plans associated with each consortium to assess viability of their proposals as successful products in the market.

In conclusion, this work aims to present key factors that can help avoid the pitfalls of previous attempts. Despite the unprecedented investment format, valuable lessons can be learned from past experiences.