

WO 2015/118225 A1

Automated Balloon Launching System and Method for Launching

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION:

5 [0001] The present invention relates to an automated balloon launching system. More particularly, the present invention is directed to an automated balloon launching system for launching at least one balloon such as a meteorological balloon or a radiosonde. The present
10 invention also relates to a method for launching at least one balloon such as a meteorological balloon or a radiosonde.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION:

15 [0002] AU 200247513 discloses a system for filling a balloon, such as a meteorological balloon, with a fluid medium such as gas. The system includes a filling nozzle for admitting the medium to the balloon, measurement means for measuring flow of the medium to the filling
20 nozzle and flow control means for controlling the flow of the medium to the filling nozzle. The system also includes processing means, responsive to the measurement means, for establishing according to a predetermined criteria when a predetermined amount of the medium has been admitted to the
25 balloon. Upon reaching the predetermined amount, the processing means causes the flow control means to terminate the flow of the medium. A method for filling the balloon is also provided.

 [0003] KR 102011052835 A teaches an automatic
30 radiosonde gas injecting and fixing apparatus to secure the safety of an operator and supply accurate buoyancy of a

sonde by automating a series of a sonde preparing process. A weight measuring load cell automatically opens and closes the gas of a radiosonde balloon part. An indicator functions the amplification of electric signals. An automatic opening and closing unit implements an automatic opening and closing operation according to the electric signals. A balloon automatic fastener and forceps are further included in an automatic radiosonde gas injecting apparatus.

10 [0004] CN 201527483 U discloses a sounding balloon releasing cylinder, which includes a cylinder, top covers, a base and supporting racks. The supporting rack is fixed on the base. A pair of electrical control devices controlling the top covers to open and close is mounted on
15 the supporting racks on the two sides of the cylinder. The electrical control device includes a motor, a worm and worm gear speed reducer and a four linkage-rod transmission mechanism. The four linkage-rod transmission mechanism is connected with the left and the right symmetrical and
20 matched top covers, and controls the top covers to open and close. A balloon releasing mechanism and a charging nozzle are mounted at the bottom inside the cylinder. The sounding balloon releasing cylinder has simple structure, convenient operation and good safety. For releasing balloons, all that
25 is needed is to start an electric control device switch, and then the balloon can be released automatically and flies out from a sounding balloon releasing cylinder. The sounding balloon releasing cylinder can be used for releasing various balloons for detecting the meteorological
30 conditions of high altitude environment or atmospheric environment.

[0005] JP 3841356 B9 teaches a balloon releasing system capable of inflating normally a balloon for observation in a balloon releasing tower to release safely the balloon. A gas supply port is provided in a moving-
5 directional tip side, in a tray horizontally movable from a balloon release preparation chamber toward an inside of a cylindrical body through an opening of the cylindrical body in the balloon releasing tower of a chamber adjacent thereto, and an intake port of the balloon for the
10 observation before filling gas is connected disconnectably to the gas supply port. A sheet of excellent water repellency is extended in the periphery of the opening on an inner circumferential face of the cylindrical body.

[0006] CN 102253429 A describes full-automatic
15 air sounding equipment. The equipment comprises a monitoring center and a remote unmanned aerological detection station which perform wireless communication with each other, wherein the unmanned aerological detection station is used for storing and launching an air sounding
20 balloon, and receiving/transmitting air sounding data. The monitoring center is used for receiving and processing the aerological detection data returned by the unmanned aerological detection station, and monitoring the operation of the unmanned aerological station. The unmanned
25 aerological detection station comprises an equipment shelter, a control computer, a data processing computer, high-wind balloon-releasing equipment, network equipment and the air sounding balloon. The control computer performs wireless communication with the monitoring center through
30 the network equipment. The control computer controls actions of the heavy-wind balloon-releasing equipment. The control computer, the heavy-wind balloon-releasing equipment, the network equipment and the non-inflated air

sounding balloon are arranged in the equipment shelter. The non-inflated air sounding balloon is launched by the heavy-wind balloon-releasing equipment. The equipment can be used for realizing full-automatic operation without human intervention.

[0007] CN 201503503 U discloses an automatic sounding balloon inflating device, which comprises a gas supply source, an inflating valve, a gas supply valve, an inflating amount control unit, an inflating valve control unit and a processing unit, wherein the inflating valve is connected with the gas supply source, and the gas supply valve is arranged between the inflating valve and the gas supply source. The inflating amount control unit is arranged between the gas supply source and the gas supply valve to output an inflating amount control signal, and the valve control unit is connected with the inflating valve and sends a first position signal and a second position signal. The processing device is connected with the valve control unit, the gas supply valve inflating amount control unit and the inflating valve control unit. The utility model can automatically inflate sounding balloons without manual intervention.

[0008] CN 101963677 A describes an atmospheric sounding high-wind ball-releasing system which comprises a cylindrical ball-releasing cylinder, a container top cover, a top cover following system, a top cover starting system, an automatic charging ball system, a dropsonde spinning reel and a ground weather instrument, wherein the top of the ball-releasing cylinder is provided with the container top cover, the ball-releasing cylinder comprises a cover and a rotary bearing arranged on a cylindrical opening, and the cover is arranged at the upper part of the rotary

bearing rotating around the ball-releasing cylinder. The section of the cover is in a hyperbolic curve. The rotary bearing comprises a static rail and a rotating support, in the top cover following system, the container top cover is
5 arranged on the rotary bearing, a drive device of the rotary support is an installed servo motor, after the servo motor obtains wind direction information according to wind direction measured according to the ground dropsonde or the wind direction measured according to a wind pressure
10 sensor, a microprocessor drives the rotary support to rotate according to a set program to ensure that the opening direction of the container top cover faces to the windward direction. The top cover opening system comprises a hydraulic pump station, a hydraulic cylinder and a
15 connecting rod.

[0009] CN 201449457 U teaches an automatic releasing mechanism for a sounding balloon. A sounding balloon inflating device comprises an inflating nozzle, an air supply source, an executing unit and a processing unit.
20 The automatic releasing mechanism for the sounding balloon comprises a locking element, a sliding block and an operating lever. The sliding block can sliding along the inflating nozzle and is provided with a first position and a second position. The locking element is provided with a
25 clamping hook, is arranged on the periphery of the inflating nozzle and is rotatably connected with the inflating nozzle and the sliding block. When the sliding block slides to the first position, the clamping hook is in clearance fit with the surface of the inflating nozzle.
30 When the sliding block slides to the second position, the clamping hook is staggered with the surface of the inflating nozzle. The operating lever is installed on the sliding block and is operationally in contact with the

executing unit. When the processing unit outputs a first control signal, the locking element clamps the check valve of the sounding balloon. When the processing unit outputs a second control signal, the locking element releases the check valve of the sounding balloon. The utility model realizes the automatic release of the sounding balloon under the situation of no human intervention.

[0010] WO 2010/061034 A1 discloses an arrangement for a launcher for sonde units and a method for launching a sonde unit from a generic launcher. The arrangement according to the invention comprises at least one sonde case, which has a generic body for storing a sonde unit, a generic launch base for receiving a sonde case, which launch base has means for launching the sonde unit, generic means for creating a sonde connection between the launcher and a radiosonde, a mechanical adapter, which is arranged to connect to the generic body and the sonde unit, and which is arranged to convert the generic launch means of the launch base to become meteorological-balloon and sonde-specific, as well as an adapter unit, which is arranged to connect to the mechanical adapter, and which is arranged to convert the generic sonde connection to be radiosonde-specific.

[0011] WO 2010/000942 A1 describes an automatic balloon release apparatus for sonde units and a method for automatically releasing sonde units, the balloon release apparatus comprising at least one balloon reserve for storing at least one sonde unit, control means for controlling the filling operation, filling means for filling the balloons of the sonde units of the balloon reserve and release means for releasing the sonde unit. The balloon reserve of the apparatus according to the invention

is formed of a basket-like matrix, removable as a unit, with gas fill conduits being brought into connection therewith for filling the balloon of each sonde unit. In the method according to the invention the sonde units are
5 stored pre-charged in the balloon reserve prior to release and the sonde unit is released by means of an automatic balloon release apparatus according to the invention. In the method the balloon reserve is kept stationary during storage and release. In case of a malfunction the next
10 suitable sonde unit is chosen for release from the balloon reserve.

[0012] US 2005/0006523 A1 teaches an automated balloonsonde launcher and a method for an automated balloonsonde launch. The automated balloonsonde launcher,
15 for example, may comprise a collapsible protective cover forming an inner region for receiving a balloon, a gas inlet for receiving a gas, a gas outlet for mating with a balloon, a valve operable between the gas inlet and the gas outlet for inflating a balloon within the inner region of
20 the protective cover. The launcher further comprises a controller that controls the valve to inflate a balloon within the protective cover, opens an opening in the protective cover and releases a balloon through the opening of the protective cover.

25 [0013] US 5,895,010 describes a radiosonde balloon launching system including a silo for housing an array of radiosonde balloon modules and for sheltering radiosonde balloons during inflation, a base for containing radiosonde balloon inflation and launch apparatus and a
30 device for shielding the silo until the radiosonde balloons are ready to be launched.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION:

[0014] Certain embodiments of the present invention are based on the object to provide an automated balloon launching system. Embodiments of the invention are particularly useful in launching at least one balloon such as a meteorological balloon or a radiosonde. Another object of certain embodiments of the invention is to provide an automated balloon launching system for launching a series of balloons without human intervention. Further, an object of certain embodiments of the invention is to provide a method for launching a balloon.

[0015] These and other objects are achieved by the embodiments of the present invention, as hereinafter described and claimed. According to an aspect of the invention, there is provided an automated balloon launching system for launching at least one balloon such as a meteorological balloon or a radiosonde comprising:

- a container,
- a storage arranged in the container for storing at least one box at a defined storage position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$, the at least one box including a balloon and a sonde,
- a release silo arranged on top of the container for sheltering the balloon during inflation, and
- a x-, y- and z-manipulator arranged in the container for feeding the storage with at least one box, and/or removing a specific box from one of the defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ and subsequent feeding the release silo with the specific box through an opening in the container.

[0016] In an embodiment, the system is comprising means for sealing the opening in the container gas tightly.

In another embodiment, the system is including at least one storage tank for a gas arranged outside of the container. According to an embodiment, the system is including a gas pipeline arranged outside of the container and connected to
5 the at least one storage tank for gas and to a gas outlet valve arranged in the release silo. Further, the system is including a ventilation system in the release silo according to an embodiment.

[0017] In an embodiment, the storage is including
10 at least one storage rack with an integer number n of defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$. In another embodiment, the defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ are arranged in l lines and c columns. The integer number n of defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ is, for
15 example, $n = 30$, $n = 50$ or $n = 70$.

[0018] According to an embodiment, the release silo is including a movable protective cover. The movable protective cover is preferably comprising two movable members, each movable member having a single rotatory
20 degree of freedom with respect to the release silo. According to another embodiment, the release silo is further comprising means for removing a burst balloon.

[0019] In an embodiment, the at least one box or the sonde is including a RFID tag for the purpose of
25 identifying and tracking the at least one box or the sonde at the defined storage position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$. The at least one box or the sonde may be connected to the automated balloon launching system by a galvanic contact.

[0020] In an embodiment, the container is
30 including a generator for power generation, at least one photovoltaic module for power generation, a computer system

for storing measurement data and/or means for wireless telecommunication.

[0021] The release silo, the means for sealing the opening in the container and/or the at least one
5 storage tank for a gas are arranged to improve safety of an operator.

[0022] According to another aspect, the object of embodiments of the invention can be achieved by a method for launching at least one balloon such as a meteorological
10 balloon or a radiosonde comprising the steps of:

- a) at least one box including a balloon and a sonde is fed into a storage arranged in a container,
- b) a specific box is removed from a defined storage position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ by a x-, y- and z-manipulator
15 arranged in the container,
- c) a release silo arranged on top of the container is fed through an opening in the container with the specific box by the x-, y- and z-manipulator,
- d) the balloon is filled with a fluid medium such as a gas
20 lighter than air within the release silo, and
- e) the balloon of the specific box is released through a release opening of the release silo.

[0023] In an embodiment, the at least one box including a balloon and a sonde is fed into the storage
25 arranged in the container manually or by the x-, y- and z-manipulator.

[0024] In another embodiment, a second specific box is removed from another defined storage position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ by the x-, y- and z-manipulator after a time

interval t . Then the release silo is fed through the opening in the container with the second specific box by the x-, y- and z-manipulator, the balloon of the second specific box is filled with a fluid medium such as a gas lighter than air within the release silo, and the balloon of the second specific box is released through an opening in the release silo. Subsequently the empty box is removed from the release silo by the x-, y- and z-manipulator and fed into the storage.

10 [0025] According to an embodiment, the time interval t is, for example, comprising the values $t = 1$ [h], $t = 6$ [h], $t = 12$ [h], and $t = 24$ [h]. The time interval t can also be dependent on the weather conditions. A series of balloons may be released in a continuous process. i.e. a first box is removed from the storage, the release silo is fed with the first box, the first balloon is filled with a fluid medium, the first balloon is released, the first box is removed from the release silo and fed into the storage, a second box is removed from the storage, the release silo is fed with the second box, the second balloon is filled with a fluid medium, the second balloon is released, the second box is removed from the release silo and fed into the storage, and so on.

25 [0026] In an embodiment, the fluid medium is comprising hydrogen, helium or methane.

[0027] According to an embodiment, the opening in the container is gas tightly sealed after feeding the release silo through the opening in the container with the specific box by the x-, y- and z-manipulator.

30 [0028] According to another embodiment, the mass flow of the fluid medium is measured during filling the

balloon for calculating the lift of the balloon. The weight of the balloon is preferably measured during and/or after filling the balloon for calculating the lift of the balloon. Preferably, the balloon is filled with the fluid
5 medium until a predetermined lift of the balloon is reached.

[0029] Considerable advantages are obtained by means of the embodiments of the present invention. The automated balloon launching system enables automatic
10 launching of at least one balloon. The system in particular enables automatic launching of a series of balloons without human intervention. The storage rack has to be refilled with boxes, each including a balloon and a sonde, depending on the balloon launching frequency. For example, if 70
15 boxes are stored in the storage rack and the launching time interval is $t = 24$ [h], i.e. one balloon per day, the automated balloon launching system according to the embodiment of the present invention can operate for more than two months without human intervention.

[0030] In addition, the release silo arranged on top of the container improves and secures safety of an operator. Arrangement of the release silo, the storage tank for gas and the gas pipeline outside of the container enables use of hydrogen as fluid medium for filling the
25 balloons. Use of hydrogen reduces operational costs of the system. Also any other suitable gas lighter than air can be used for filling the balloons. Balloons are further filled with the fluid medium within the release silo and bursting balloons cannot harm the operator. The container is sealed
30 gas tightly after feeding the release silo with a specific box including a balloon and a sonde. The system according

to the embodiment of the invention can be therefore classified as "EX-safe" (explosion safe).

[0031] Arrangement of the release silo on top of the container eliminates the possibility of a gas flow of a gas lighter than air in a direction downstream into the container. Of course, a gas flow of a gas lighter than air in a direction upstream from the release silo into the container is not possible. Since explosive gases such as hydrogen are typically used for filling the balloons of a radiosonde for cost reasons, arrangement of the release silo on top of the container improves safety of the balloon launching system. Complex mechanical structures in order to avoid a downstream gas flow into the container are not necessary according to the embodiments of the invention. This reduces, for example, production time of the system, weight of the system, and costs of the system. Additionally, the level of a potential explosion will be above the level of an operator during operation of the balloon launching system.

[0032] Beside improving and securing safety of an operator, systems of the "Ex-safe" type can be used in any environment, for example in security relevant environments such as airports, harbours or industrial plants. The release silo also shelters the balloon during inflation, e.g. from wind, rain or snow.

[0033] If the automated balloon launching system is further equipped with a generator for power generation or at least one photovoltaic module, a computer system for storing radiosonde measurement data such as temperature or air humidity, and means for wireless telecommunication, autonomous operation of the system is possible and

radiosonde measurement data can be transmitted to a control station.

[0034] When storing the detachable release silo in the container, the automated balloon launching system
5 can be further easily transported, e.g. by truck, ship, plane or railway, to any desired place of installation such as for example an island or a location in an arctic region.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS:

10 [0035] For a more complete understanding of particular embodiments of the present invention and their advantages, reference is now made to the following descriptions, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. In the drawings:

15 [0036] **Fig. 1** illustrates a schematic view of an automated balloon launching system according to a first embodiment of the invention,

[0037] **Fig. 2** illustrates a schematic view of a storage rack and a x-, y- and z-manipulator of an automated
20 balloon launching system according to a second embodiment of the invention,

[0038] **Fig. 3** illustrates a schematic view of an automated balloon launching system for launching at least one balloon according to a third embodiment of the
25 invention, and

[0039] **Fig. 4** illustrates a schematic view of a part of the manipulator and a box of an automated balloon launching system according to a fourth embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION:

[0040] In **Fig. 1** a schematic view of an automated balloon launching system 1 for launching at least one balloon 2 such as a meteorological balloon or a radiosonde according to a first embodiment of the invention is shown. The system 1 is comprising a container 3 with a storage 4 arranged in the container 3 for storing at least one box 5, which is not shown in Fig. 1, at a defined storage position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$. The at least one box 5 is including a balloon 2 and a sonde 6. A release silo 7 is arranged on top of the container 3 for sheltering the balloon 2 during inflation. The release silo 7 may be detachable. In the container 3 a x-, y- and z-manipulator 8, which is not shown in Fig. 1, is arranged for feeding the storage with at least one box, for removing a specific box 5 from one of the defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$, and for subsequent feeding the release silo 7 with the specific box 5 through an opening 11 in the container 3.

[0041] The opening 11 in the container 3 may be gas tightly sealed after feeding the release silo 7 with a specific box 5. Outside of the container 3 a storage tank 12 for gas, e.g. helium or hydrogen, may be arranged. A gas pipeline 14 arranged outside of the container 3 may be connected to the storage tank 12 for gas and to a gas outlet valve arranged in the release silo 7. Since the gas used is lighter than air, gas cannot flow in a direction upstream from the release silo 7 into the container 3 during filling of a balloon 2. Also the possibility of a gas flow into a direction downstream into the container 3 is eliminated. The system 1 may further include a ventilation system for ventilation of the release silo. Gas can be removed from the release silo 7 in case of gas

leaking into the release silo 7. The system 1 according to the embodiment of the invention can be classified as "EX-safe" and may be for example used in security relevant environments such as airports, harbours or industrial plants.

[0042] Another embodiment of the system 1 according to the invention may include a generator for power generation, a computer system for storing measurement data and/or means for wireless telecommunication. The generator for power generation may be for example a gas or fuel generator. According to a certain embodiment the gas generator is a hydrogen generator. In another embodiment of the system 1 at least one outer surface of the container 3 may be further equipped with at least one photovoltaic module for power generation. The system 1 may also include an electrical connection for power supply.

[0043] In **Fig. 2** a schematic view of a storage rack 9 and a x-, y- and z-manipulator 8 of an automated balloon launching system 1 according to a second embodiment of the invention is illustrated. Preferably, the storage 4 is including a storage rack 9 with an integer number n of defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$. The defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ are arranged in l lines and c columns. The integer number n of defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ may be, for example, $n = 30$, $n = 50$ or $n = 70$. The x-, y- and z-manipulator 8 can handle boxes 5 in x-, y- and z-direction. The manipulator 8 can feed the storage rack 9 with a box 5 at a defined position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$, for example at position $p = 8$ in the second line and the third column of the storage rack 9 of the storage 4. The manipulator 8 can also remove a specific box from one of the defined position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ and feed

the release silo 7 with the removed box 5 through an opening 11 in the container 3 subsequently. Each box 5 or sonde 6 in the storage rack 9 may include a RFID tag for the purpose of identifying and tracking the box 5 or the sonde 6 at the defined storage position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$.

[0044] In **Fig. 3** a schematic view of an automated balloon launching system 1 for launching at least one balloon 2 such as a meteorological balloon or a radiosonde according to a third embodiment of the invention is illustrated. After feeding the release silo 7 with a specific box 5 the opening 11 in the container 3 may be gas tightly sealed. The release silo 7 shelters the balloon 2 during inflation, e.g. from wind, rain or snow. During inflation of the balloon 2 a movable protective cover 10 for covering a release opening in the release silo 7 may be in an open or closed position. The system 1 according to the embodiment of the invention may include means for measuring the mass flow of gas or the weight of the balloon 2 during filling the balloon 2 with the gas. The measurement data may be used for calculating the lift of the balloon 2. The balloon 2 may be filled with the gas until a predetermined lift of the balloon 2 is reached. The balloon 2 may be then released through the release opening in the release silo 7. Subsequently the empty box 5 is removed from the release silo 7 by the x-, y- and z-manipulator 8 and fed into the storage 4.

[0045] In **Fig. 4** a schematic view of a part of the manipulator 8 and a box 5 of an automated balloon launching system 1 according to a fourth embodiment of the invention is illustrated. After feeding the release silo 7 with a specific box 5 the opening of the container 3, which is not shown in Fig. 4, may be sealed gas tightly by the

ground plate 15 of the manipulator 8. A gasket ring may be arranged on the ground plate 15 to seal the opening 11 in the container 3 gas tightly as long as the manipulator 8 exerts a force in z-direction.

5 [0046] Although the present invention has been described in detail for the purpose of illustration, various changes and modifications can be made within the scope of the claims. In addition, it is to be understood that the present disclosure contemplates that, to the
10 extent possible, one or more features of any embodiment may be combined with one or more features of any other embodiment.

 [0047] It is to be understood that the embodiments of the invention disclosed are not limited to
15 the particular structures, process steps, or materials disclosed herein, but are extended to equivalents thereof as would be recognized by those ordinarily skilled in the relevant arts. It should also be understood that terminology employed herein is used for the purpose of
20 describing particular embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting.

 [0048] According to the present invention the term box 5 means a container including a balloon and a sonde. In accordance with the invention this box 5 may be
25 of any shape and can be rigid or elastic.

List of reference numbers:

	1	automated balloon launching system
	2	balloon
5	3	container
	4	storage
	5	box
	6	sonde
	7	release silo
10	8	x-, y- and z-manipulator
	9	storage rack
	10	protective cover
	11	opening
	12	storage tank
15	13	ventilation system
	14	gas pipeline
	15	ground plate
	c	column
	l	line
20	p	defined storage position
	t	time interval

Claims:

1. Automated balloon launching system (1) for launching at least one balloon (2) such as a meteorological balloon or a radiosonde comprising:
- 5
- a container (3),
 - a storage (4) arranged in the container (3) for storing at least one box (5) at a defined storage position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$, the at least one box (5) including a balloon (2) and a sonde (6),
 - 10
 - a release silo (7) arranged on top of the container (3) for sheltering the balloon (2) during inflation, and
 - a x-, y- and z-manipulator (8) arranged in the container (3) for feeding the storage with at least one box (5),
 - 15
 - and/or removing a specific box (5) from one of the defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ and subsequent feeding the release silo (7) with the specific box (5) through an opening (11) in the container (3).
2. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to claim 1, the system (1) comprising means for sealing the opening (11) in the container (3) gas tightly.
- 20
3. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to claim 1 or 2, the system (1) including at least one storage tank (12) for a gas arranged outside of the container (3).
- 25
4. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to any of the claims 1 to 3, the system (1) including a ventilation system (13) in the release silo (7).

5. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to any of the claims 1 to 4, the system (1) including a gas pipeline (14) arranged outside of the container (3) and connected to the at least one storage tank (12) for gas and to a gas outlet valve arranged in the release silo (7).
6. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to any of the claims 1 to 5, the storage (4) including at least one storage rack (9) with an integer number n of defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$.
7. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to any of the claims 1 to 6, the defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ arranged in l lines and c columns.
8. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to any of the claims 1 to 7, wherein the integer number n of defined storage positions $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ is $n = 30$, $n = 50$ or $n = 70$.
9. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to any of the claims 1 to 8, wherein the release silo (7) is including a movable protective cover (10) for covering a release opening.
10. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to any of the claims 1 to 9, the at least one box (5) or the sonde (6) including a RFID tag for the purpose of identifying and tracking the at least one box (5) or the sonde (6) at the defined storage position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$.
11. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to any of the claims 1 to 9, wherein the at least one box (5) or the sonde (6) is connected to the automated balloon launching system (1) by a galvanic contact.

12. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to any of the claims 1 to 11, the system (1) including a generator for power generation, at least one photovoltaic module for power generation, a computer system for storing
5 measurement data and/or means for wireless telecommunication.

13. The automated balloon launching system (1) according to any of the claims 1 to 12, wherein the release silo (7), the means for sealing the opening (11) in the container (3)
10 and/or the at least one storage tank (12) for a gas are arranged to improve and secure safety of an operator.

14. Method for launching at least one balloon (2) such as a meteorological balloon or a radiosonde comprising the steps of:

- 15 a) at least one box (5) including a balloon (2) and a sonde (6) is fed into a storage (4) arranged in a container (3),
b) a specific box (5) is removed from a defined storage position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ by a x-, y- and z-manipulator (8) arranged in the container (3),
20 c) a release silo (7) arranged on top of the container (3) is fed through an opening (11) in the container (3) with the specific box (5) by the x-, y- and z-manipulator (8),
d) the balloon (2) is filled with a fluid medium such as a gas lighter than air within the release silo (7), and
25 e) the balloon (2) of the specific box (5) is released through an release opening of the release silo (7).

15. The method according to claim 14, wherein the at least one box (5) including a balloon (2) and a sonde (6) is fed

into the storage (4) arranged in the container (3) manually or by the x-, y- and z-manipulator (8).

16. The method according to claim 14 or 15, wherein

a) a second specific box (5) is removed from another
5 defined storage position $p = 1, 2, \dots, n$ by the x-, y- and z-manipulator (8) after a time interval (t),

b) the release silo (7) is fed through the opening (11) in the container (3) with the second specific box (5) by the x-, y- and z-manipulator (8),

10 c) the balloon (2) of the second specific box (5) is filled with a fluid medium such as a gas lighter than air within the release silo (7), and

d) the balloon (2) of the second specific box (5) is released through an opening in the release silo (7).

15 **17.** The method according to claim 16, wherein the time interval t is comprising the values $t = 1$ [h], $t = 6$ [h], $t = 12$ [h], and $t = 24$ [h].

18. The method according to any of the claims 14 to 17, wherein the fluid medium is comprising hydrogen, helium or
20 methane.

19. The method according to any of the claims 14 to 18, wherein the opening (11) in the container (3) is gas tightly sealed after feeding the release silo (7) through the opening (11) in the container (3) with the specific box
25 (5) by the x-, y- and z-manipulator (8).

20. The method according to any of the claims 14 to 19, wherein the mass flow of the fluid medium is measured during filling the balloon (2) for calculating the lift of the balloon (2).

- 21.** The method according to any of the claims 14 to 19, wherein the weight of the balloon (2) is measured during and/or after filling the balloon (2) for calculating the lift of the balloon (2).
- 5 **22.** The method according to any of the claims 20 or 21, wherein the balloon (2) is filled with the fluid medium until a predetermined lift of the balloon (2) is reached.

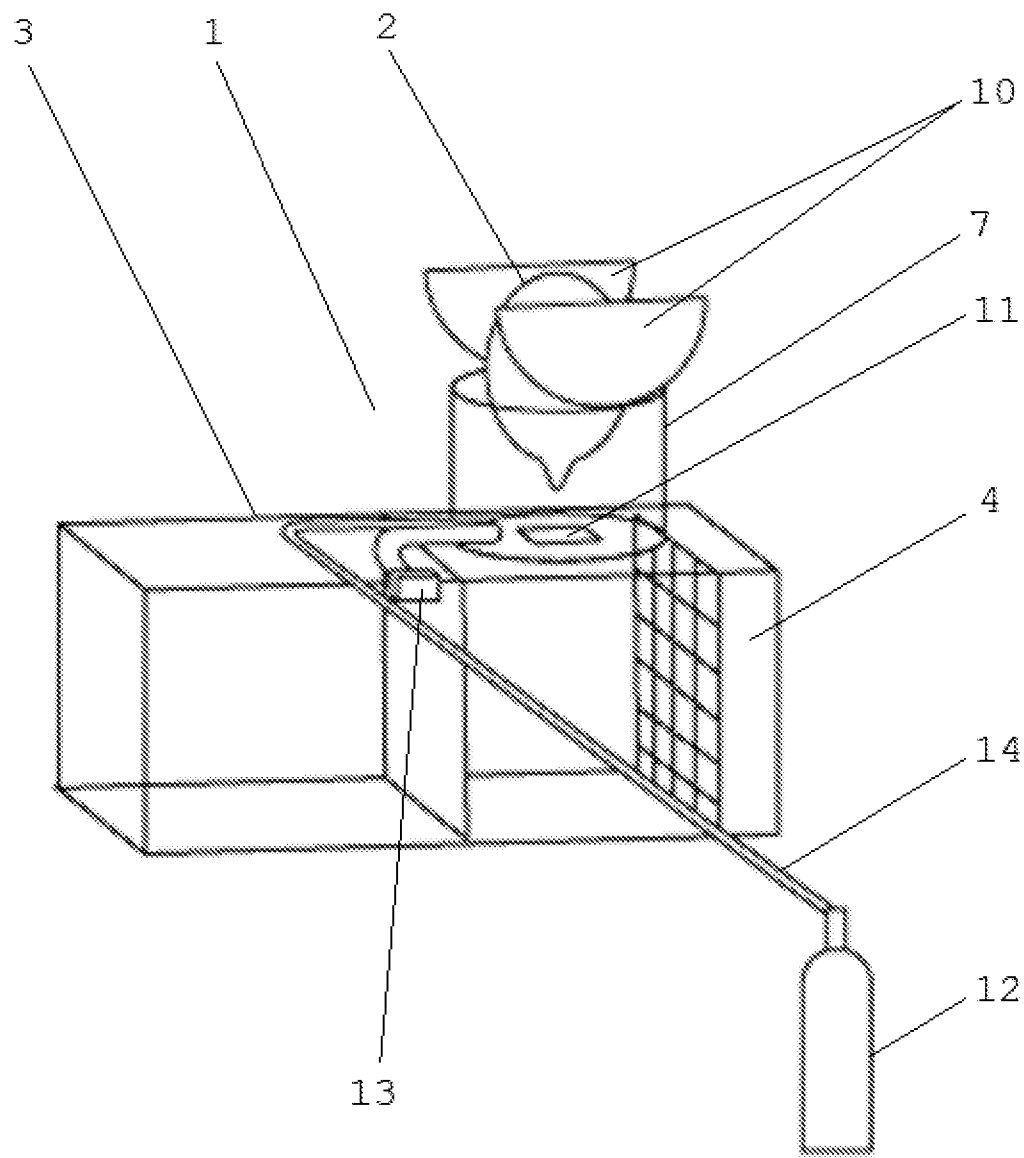


Fig. 1

2/4

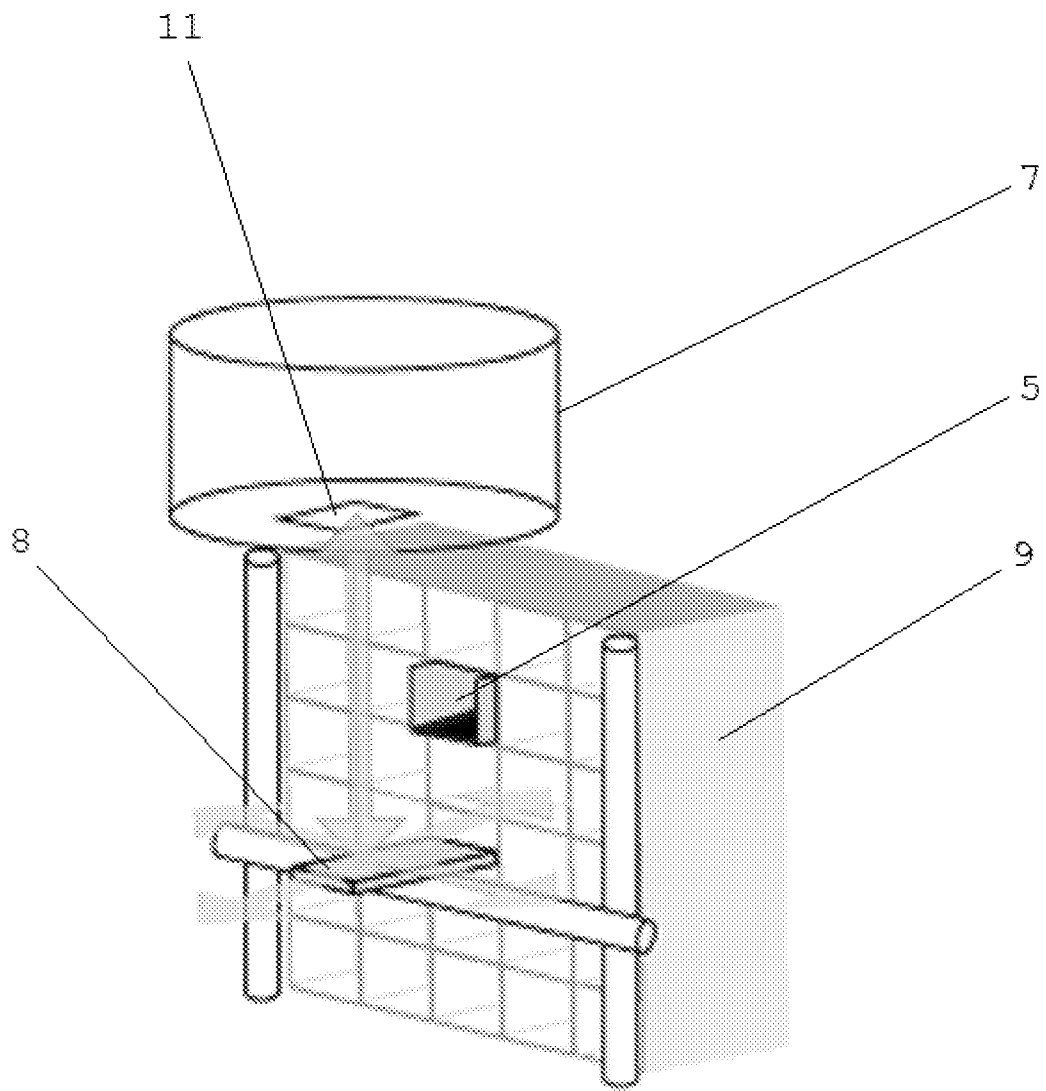


Fig. 2

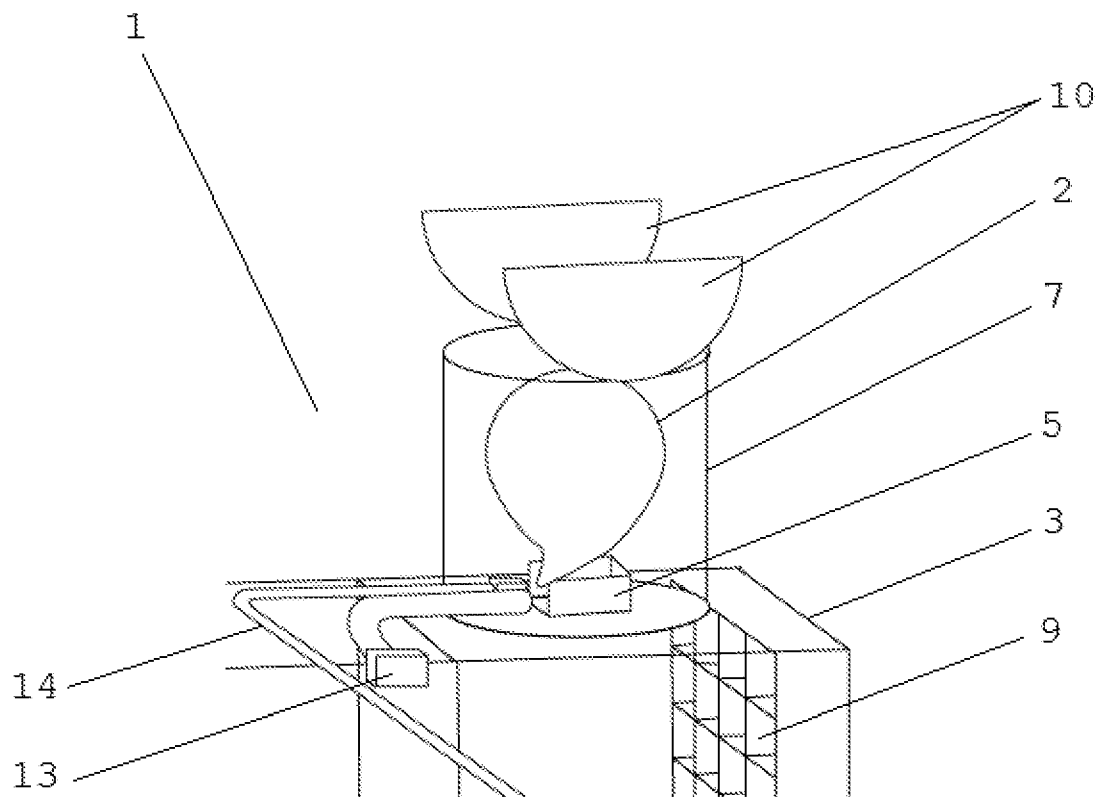


Fig. 3

4 / 4

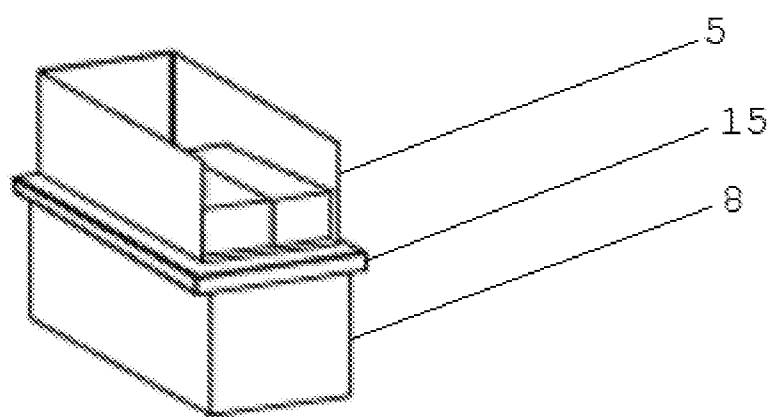


Fig. 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/FI2015/050073

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

See extra sheet

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC: G01W, B64B, B64F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched
FI, SE, NO, DK

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base, and, where practicable, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI, BIOSIS, COMPDX, EMBASE, INSPEC, MEDLINE, NPL, TDB, XP3GPP, XPAIP, XPESP, XPETSI, XPI3E, XPIEE, XPIETF, XPIOP, XPIPCOM, XPJPEG, XPMISC, XPOAC, XPRD, XPTK

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 5895010 A (AURILIO GIUSEPPE [US] et al.) 20 April 1999 (20.04.1999) cited in the application, abstract; figures 1A, 10 - 12; column 1, lines 40 - 53; column 4, line 40 - column 5, line 31; column 7, lines 20 - 51	1 - 22
Y	CN 102253429 A (NANJING DAQIAO MACHINERY CO LTD [CN]) 23 November 2011 (23.11.2011) cited in the application, figures 1, 3 & EPODOC abstract (Espacenet); Google machine translation, paragraphs [0004] - [0010], [0024], [0027] - [0033], [0039] - [0058]	1 - 22

☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.
☒ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"&" document member of the same patent family
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search

16 April 2015 (16.04.2015)

Date of mailing of the international search report

22 April 2015 (22.04.2015)

Name and mailing address of the ISA/FI
Finnish Patent and Registration Office
P.O. Box 1160, FI-00101 HELSINKI, Finland
Facsimile No. +358 9 6939 5328

Authorized officer
Antti Salmela
Telephone No. +358 9 6939 500

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/FI2015/050073

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	WO 2010061034 A1 (VAISALA OYJ [FI]) 03 June 2010 (03.06.2010) cited in the application, abstract; page 4, line 15 - page 7, line 3; page 7, line 28 - page 8, line 25; figures 1 - 4	1 - 22
A	JP 2006036104 A (METEOROLOGICAL AGENCY [JP]) 09 February 2006 (09.02.2006) figures 1 - 2, 7 & PAJ abstract; JPO-INPIT machine translation, paragraphs [0002] - [0009], [0038], [0046] - [0050]	2, 4, 19
A	US 5636480 A (LAURITSEN DEAN K [US] et al.) 10 June 1997 (10.06.1997) abstract; figures 1 - 6; column 3, line 11 - column 6, line 30	4
A	AU 200247513 A1 (ENGERTROL PTY LTD [AU]) 19 December 2002 (19.12.2002) cited in the application, abstract; page 6, line 24 - page 7, line 22; page 13, line 16 - page 14, line 11; page 18, lines 11 - 27; figures 1 - 3, 5	2, 4, 19

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
Information on Patent Family Members

International application No.
PCT/FI2015/050073

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family members(s)	Publication date
US 5895010 A	20/04/1999	US 5850987 A US 5850988 A US 5901922 A	22/12/1998 22/12/1998 11/05/1999
.....			
CN 102253429 A	23/11/2011	CN 102253429 B	17/07/2013
.....			
WO 2010061034 A1	03/06/2010	CN 102227652 A CN 102227652 B EP 2350703 A1	26/10/2011 01/05/2013 03/08/2011
.....			
JP 2006036104 A	09/02/2006	None	
.....			
US 5636480 A	10/06/1997	WO 9613737 A1	09/05/1996
.....			
AU 200247513 A1	19/12/2002	AU 785120 B2	28/09/2006
.....			

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/FI2015/050073

CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC
G01W 1/08 (2006.01)