AHEAD (Integrated Activities in the High Energy Astrophysics Domain) is a forthcoming project approved in the framework of the European Horizon 2020 program (Research Infrastructures for High Energy Astrophysics). The overall objective of AHEAD is to integrate national efforts in high-energy Astrophysics and to promote the domain at the European level, to keep its community at the cutting edge of science and technology and ensure that space observatories for high-energy astrophysics, with particular regard to Athena, are at the state of the art. AHEAD will integrate key research infrastructures for on-ground test and calibration of space-based sensors and electronics and promote their coordinated use. In parallel, the best facilities for data analysis of high-energy astrophysical observatories will be made available to the European community. The technological development will focus on the improvement of selected critical technologies, background modeling and cross-calibration for the benefit of future high energy missions like Athena, and the best exploitation of existing observatories. The advancement in space oriented instrumentation and cutting-edge sensor technology in Europe will enable the development of new technologies and the growth of the related European market with a dedicated technology innovation package.

Through AHEAD, feasibility studies of space-based instrumentation for future gamma-ray missions will be also carried out. Finally, AHEAD will support the community via grants for collaborative studies, dissemination of results, and promotion of workshops, and a strong public outreach package will ensure that the domain is well publicized at national, European and International level. The project duration is 3.5 years starting September 2015.

The AHEAD program

Joint Research Activities will mainly focus on:

- Technology development (sensors and optics for new generation X-ray instruments). Build-up on the Athena development to improve baseline technology
- Science prioritization and feasibility studies for gamma-ray instrumentation (~0.1-50 MeV)
- Background modelling and cross-calibrations
- Technology Innovation for applications outside the astrophysics domain

Networking activities:

Preparing the community at large for the successful exploitation of the high-energy telescopes of the next decade, with particular regard to Athena, but also facilities with European involvement closer to launch, such as ASTRO-H and E-Rosita.

- Visitor programs, schools, Topical Conferences/Meetings: supporting meetings, schools and grants for visitors
- Public Outreach: production of videos, educational material, coordination of press releases and organization of exhibitions

Transnational Access:

- Funding team visits to 13 experimental facilities in Europe:
  - X-ray Beamlines: LLTFB (Univ. of Leicester) and XACT (INAF/Palermo)
  - Thermal vacuum and other test facilities: Test equipments at ERIOS (Lab. d’Astrophysique Marseille) and SERMS (Univ. of Perugia)
- Access to X-ray data analysis using archives of existing observatories, including tutorials and mentoring by experienced scientists. Funding visits to data centres at: 1. Univ.of Leicester, 2. SRON, 3. Univ.of Geneva, 4. INAF (OAR,INAF/Bologna,OAPA), 5. NOA, 6. CEA

All transnational access and visiting programs will be based on public calls to be released periodically.

The Consortium

The AHEAD Consortium is formed by 26 major European Research Institutions from 16 countries:

[Table of institutions]

Networking, joint research activities and access to infrastructures as devised in AHEAD, will serve to establish strong connections between institutes and industry to create the basis for a more rapid advancement of high-energy astrophysical science, space oriented instrumentation and cutting-edge sensor technology in Europe.

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Image: Diagram of the AHEAD project structure and components.