

Partnership between NASA and Italy's space agency paves way for breakthrough mission

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A new partnership forged between **NASA** and **Italy's space agency** paves the way for a breakthrough mission to explore some of the most **turbulent and extreme environments in our universe** -- from the hottest, messiest star factories to violent jets screaming away from monster black holes.

Robert Lightfoot, NASA's acting administrator, signed an agreement June 20 with **Roberto Battiston**, president of the **Italian Space Agency (ASI)**, defining the terms of cooperation for the **Imaging X-ray Polarimetry Explorer (IXPE)** mission during a ceremony at the **Paris Air Show** in **Le Bourget**.

'**NASA** welcomes the opportunity to work with **ASI** on this mission, to build upon a history of **strong cooperation** between our agencies in the space sciences,' said **Lightfoot**. 'We wish all those working on IXPE great success in the years ahead, and we eagerly anticipate the scientific promise of this exciting space science mission.'

'With this agreement Italy confirms to play a leading role in the scientific field of high energy studies,' said **Battiston**. 'This cooperation with NASA is the demonstration of the high standard of our work.'

The **IXPE** mission, slated to launch in **2020**, will fly three telescope systems capable of **measuring the polarization of X-rays emitted by cosmic sources**. By taking advantage of polarization as a tool for exploration, IXPE will provide important clues about the origins of cosmic X-rays and their interactions with matter and gravity as they travel through space.

ASI will contribute **IXPE's sophisticated 'eyes'** -- three polarization-sensitive **X-ray detectors** which were developed in Italy -- and the use of its equatorial ground station located at Malindi, Kenya.

NASA will supply the **X-ray telescopes** and use of its facilities to perform end-to-end X-ray calibration and science operations.

Ball Aerospace in Broomfield, Colorado, will provide the **spacecraft and mission integration**. Ball Aerospace will also operate the flight system with support from the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Other partners include **Stanford University**, **McGill University** and the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology**.

IXPE is next in the line of Small Explorer missions. NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, manages the Explorers Program. NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, leads the mission for the agency's Science Mission Directorate in Washington.

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