ESO Supernova groundbreaking

Tim de Zeeuw
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Sehr geehrter Herr Doktor Tschira,
Sehr geehrter Herr Erster Bürgermeister Doktor Gruchmann,
Sehr geehrter Herr Landrat Göbel,
Sehr geehrter Herr Professor Roche,
Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

ich freue mich sehr, Sie zu dieser Feier zu begrüßen. Wie Sie sicherlich bemerken, spreche ich nicht fließend Deutsch, und ich hoffe daher auf Ihr Verständnis, wenn ich mit dieser Rede auf Englisch fortfahre.

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Headquarters of the European Organisation for Astronomical Research in the Southern Hemisphere, also known as the European Southern Observatory, or simply ESO. ESO is an intergovernmental organisation which constructs and operates state-of-the-art telescopes in the Atacama desert in Northern Chile to enable scientists in the Member States to make astronomical discoveries and so contribute to our understanding of the Universe we live in.

We are here today at a very exciting time for ESO. We announced the plans to build the ESO Supernova Planetarium and Visitor Centre in December 2013, a little over a year ago. Since then, ESO has signed an accession agreement with Poland, and I expect to welcome Poland as a new Member State once the agreement is ratified later this year. In December 2014, our main governing body, the ESO Council, gave the green light for the construction in two phases of the European Extremely Large Telescope, or E-ELT. Spending of around one billion euros has been authorised for the first phase, in which we will construct the world's largest optical and infrared telescope, with a diameter of 39 metres. The

‘first light’ of the E-ELT — when we make the first observations — is targeted in ten years time. As the world’s biggest “eye on the sky” this telescope will enable tremendous scientific discoveries.

So, this is an exciting time for ESO, but excitement is not at all unusual for us. Astronomers ask some of the deepest and most exciting questions that there are: Where do we come from? What is the Cosmos made of? Are there other planets like our Earth, and is there life out there? In astronomy, we deal with the extremes of science: from the smallest subatomic particles to the greatest distances and most massive objects in the Universe; from the lowest to the highest temperatures in space; and from events that take place in the blink of an eye to the longest stretches of cosmic time. Astronomy comes with a sense of wonder almost guaranteed!

Thanks to this sense of wonder, astronomy is in the enviable position of being one of the sciences in which people are very interested. This makes astronomy a perfect way to attract young minds to science and technology, which is crucial for the development of our society, and for the long-term survival of our civilization.

ESO recognises the importance of encouraging this interest in science and technology, and we have an active programme of education and outreach. The building that will be constructed on this site will give a new dimension to that outreach programme. It will house a fulldome planetarium and more than 2000 square metres of permanent and temporary exhibitions, providing an immersive experience of astronomy and ESO’s scientific results, projects and technological breakthroughs. It is made possible by a collaboration between ESO and the Heidelberg Institute for Theoretical Studies. The Klaus Tschira Stiftung has generously offered to fully fund the construction, and ESO will run the facility. This wonderful gift is very much appreciated by the ESO Member States.

Of course, it is not just ESO that will benefit from this gift. Outreach is all about sharing the sense of wonder of our work, and we look forward to sharing the many benefits of the ESO Supernova. We will collaborate with neighbouring

astronomy institutes on the Garching research campus to make the most of this centre.

I am also grateful for the support of the city of Garching in bringing the ESO Supernova here, and am sure that this centre will be a great asset to Garching and the local area. Indeed, I expect it to shine like a supernova, generating enthusiasm and passion for astronomy far and wide.

I am very pleased to thank Doctor Tschira and the Board of the *Klaus Tschira Stiftung* for their most generous gift. With today's groundbreaking, or *Spatenstich*, we celebrate the start of construction of the ESO Supernova together.

It is exciting to think that there are young people out there today, whether in Garching or the Munich area, in Germany, in our other member states, or in Chile, who will be inspired by this centre, and who will get involved in science and technology. Perhaps, in a decade, they will be among the first people working with the E-ELT when it opens its eye on the cosmos. Who knows what they will discover?

Separate section describing the ESO Supernova logo

It gives me great pleasure today to formally unveil the logo of the ESO Supernova. Supernovae are extremely bright exploding stars, which play a key role in the Universe. They spread their material out into space, enriching the region around them with the chemical elements necessary for life, and their shockwaves can trigger the birth of the next generation of stars.

The fundamental element of the centre's logo comes from the star used in ESO's own logo. The multiple overlapping stars symbolise the energy of a supernova and the vibrant energy of this educational facility, which will spread the wonder of astronomy, enriching people's interest in science and technology. Some of these people may become scientists and engineers — a 'next generation of stars' in their own way!