

"Although first light was specified for the night of the 25th of May, the internal planning target date was the 15th of May. By this time we had moved out of the hut in the enclosure and were operating the telescope from the relative comfort of the control room. On the night of the 15th of May we decided that we should meet all specifications laid out in the integration plan for the telescope. The target was to be ω Cen. Conditions were excellent:

low wind and good seeing. We started a 10-minute exposure on target with the test camera. We had never tried anything as long as this. Krister Wirenstrand anxiously waited for the test camera CCD to read out. This was to be the first true image taken with the telescope on a scientific CCD. When the image was transferred to the Real Time Display, we quickly measured the image quality. Great jubilation again as the stars ap-

peared at 0.48 arcseconds. A series of other measurements on tracking stability and image quality verified the telescope had met all the performance criteria for first light."

Tarengi, M., Gray, P., Spyromilio, J. & Gilmozzi, R. 1998, *The Messenger*, 93, 4

Austria Declares Intent to Join ESO

At a press conference held at the University of Vienna Observatory on 24 April 2008, the Austrian Science Minister Johannes Hahn announced the decision by the Austrian Government to seek membership of ESO from 1 July of this year.

Said Minister Hahn: "With membership of ESO, Austria's scientists will receive direct access to the world's leading infrastructure in astronomy. This strengthens Austria as a place for research and provides an opportunity for young researchers to continue their work from here. With this move, Austria takes an important step in the reinforcement of Europe's science and research infrastructure."

The ESO Director General Tim de Zeeuw responded: "ESO welcomes the Austrian bid to join our organisation. I salute the Austrian Government for taking this important step and look forward to working closely with our Austrian friends and colleagues in the years to come."

The decision constitutes a major breakthrough for Austrian astronomers who have argued for joining ESO for many years. Membership would mean not only unrestricted access to ESO's world-leading observational facilities, including the Very Large Telescope and full participation in the international ALMA project, but also the possibility to participate in future projects, including the realisation of the European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT), which is currently in its design phase.



All these projects require some of the most advanced technologies in key areas such as optics, detectors, lightweight structures, etc. Austrian participation in ESO opens the door for Austrian industry and major research institutes to take part in the development of such technologies, with their associated potential for industrial spin off.

The main centres for astronomical research in Austria are at the Universities of Graz, Innsbruck and Vienna. Furthermore, scientists in the area of mathematics, applied physics and computer science have already expressed their

From left to right: Prof. Tim de Zeeuw, ESO Director General, Prof. Sabine Schindler, the President of the Austrian Society for Astronomy and Astrophysics, and Dr. Johannes Hahn, the Austrian Science Minister.

interest in contributing to the development of the advanced technologies required for ESO's future projects.

The Austrian bid for ESO membership was formally approved by the ESO Council at its meeting on 3–4 June and is now subject to ratification by the Austrian Parliament.

(Adapted from ESO Press Release 11/08)