

Of these three science committees all people asked to serve as members in my time have consented without fail. This is, I think, a mark of ESO's stature in our community.

The Member States Delegations

The science committees are from member States but the members come as scientists, do not represent member State governments. The members of the Finance Committee and of the Council do; we fly the flags when they meet officially, as they normally do twice per year. Their task and authority are set out in the ESO Convention and in the Financial Protocol. The Director General receives instructions and guidelines from Council, which also approves the budget and major decisions, including appointments of senior members of staff.

The FC advises Council and exercises several functions delegated to it by Council, most important of which perhaps is that of approving executive proposals to conclude contracts. The introduction to the Annual Report 1991 gives an interesting example of this activity in VLT practice.

This is not the place to elaborate on the Executive's relations with delegations or on the delegations' internal relations. It is clear that there is a great variety of interests, national and individual, of personalities and styles, which combine to form a complex and sometimes unpredictable whole. My profes-

sional training, as one Council member put it to me, has made me articulate but not very diplomatic. In the end the tremendous workload and my diplomatic weakness, which could perhaps have been corrected by a much greater time investment, time I did not find, resulted in increasing estrangement between several delegations and myself. Thus the confidence base, essential for successful continuation, eroded.

The delegations have, for these five years, persuaded their governments to provide ESO with all the means necessary for its mission. The limits of our work were in human resources, not in funding. Council understandably and effectively controls the expenditure growth by putting ceilings on the numbers of the several categories of staff that can be on the payroll at the same time. That actually determines the scope of ESO's work and the pace of its VLT programme. The member States' support has been very impressive and has relieved us of the constant money worries which plague so many other organizations, so that we could fully concentrate on the work itself. That is ground for appreciation and optimism.

A Personal Note

Ending this "farewell article" on a personal note, I must admit I had underestimated the cultural complexity of ESO at all levels. In governing bodies, in committees, in management teams and among personnel, there are so many

perceptions of authority, notions of hierarchy, appreciations of frankness and openness, that the learning process is a long and subtle one. In Chile this is even more difficult. This culture diversity is extremely interesting in its dynamic patterns; it is extremely difficult to handle managerially and in policy making.

Looking back, I am convinced we have collectively achieved a great deal. I worked on the premise that all-out service to the idea of ESO, to the furthering of research opportunities of the community for which it exists, was necessary and sufficient. I have no regrets of being an idealist in this respect.

As an ESO staff member and advisor to the new Director General, I hope, at some distance, to continue to serve and observe. I look forward to resuming my scholarly work, to meeting community astronomers in their own institutes and at conferences. The Council decision may well be a blessing in disguise for my personal and our family life. After two activist decades in Leiden and five exciting but exhausting years in ESO, I anticipate a welcome change of pace. I have not had a chance for full time study, research and writing since my graduate student days in Cambridge thirty years ago!

I express my gratitude to all who have made these years so fascinating, many of whom share with me the idea(l) of ESO. May it flourish on Paranal, on La Silla, in Santiago, in Garching and throughout Europe's astronomy community.

Developments in ESO/Chile

In the course of 1992 important events took place related to ESO activities in Chile. Some of them require clarification in order to avoid the circulation of unnecessary rumours related to ESO's relations with the Government of Chile, the local staff and the Paranal site.

Relations with Chile

Concerning the general relations with Chile, the ESO Council decided in its 67th Meeting on June 4 and 5, 1992, to offer Chile membership in ESO and invited a Chilean delegation to start discussing this issue with ESO in Europe. This offer was made on the background of similar discussions which had already taken place in the 1960s and taking into account the wish of the Chilean astronomical community for closer scientific cooperation with ESO, including the desire to obtain a fixed percentage of observing time.

The offer of membership was transmitted to the Chilean Government in June this year, followed by some high-level meetings with Chilean government officials in Santiago. Apart from more formal communications confirming the receipt of this offer and its appreciation, the Chilean side has not yet replied to the invitation to begin discussions aimed at ESO membership.

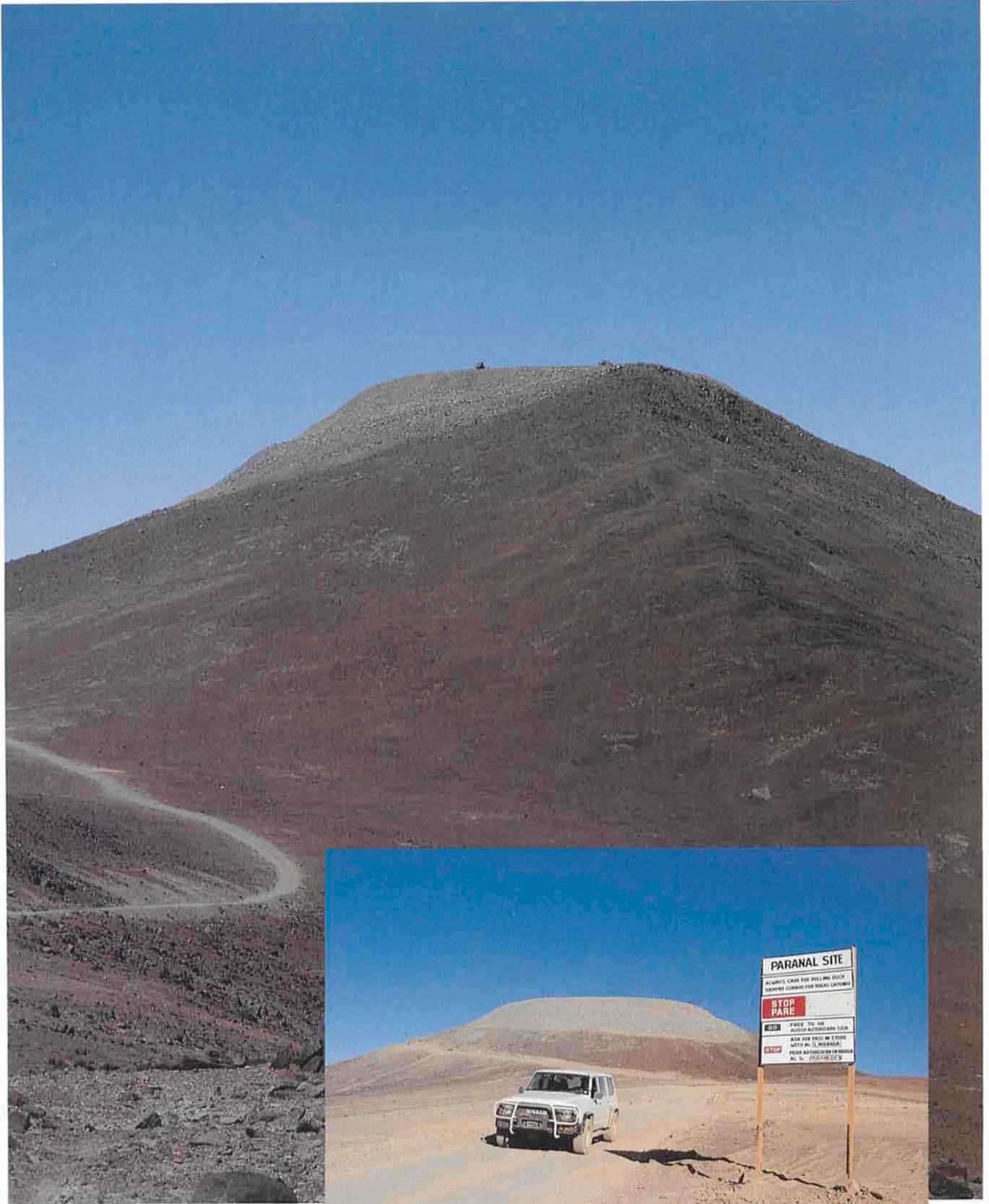
The ESO Council at its 68th Meeting on December 1 and 2, 1992, discussed this issue, and a new initiative by ESO is now in preparation.

Local Staff Matters

Issues raised by the ESO local staff in Chile concentrate on the recognition within ESO of a national syndicate which the Chile local staff has established on the basis of national Chilean law and also on the request to reach a salary level comparable to that of the international staff.

Like other international organizations, ESO, because of its status, cannot accept national trade union activities within the organization.

(Continued on page 8)

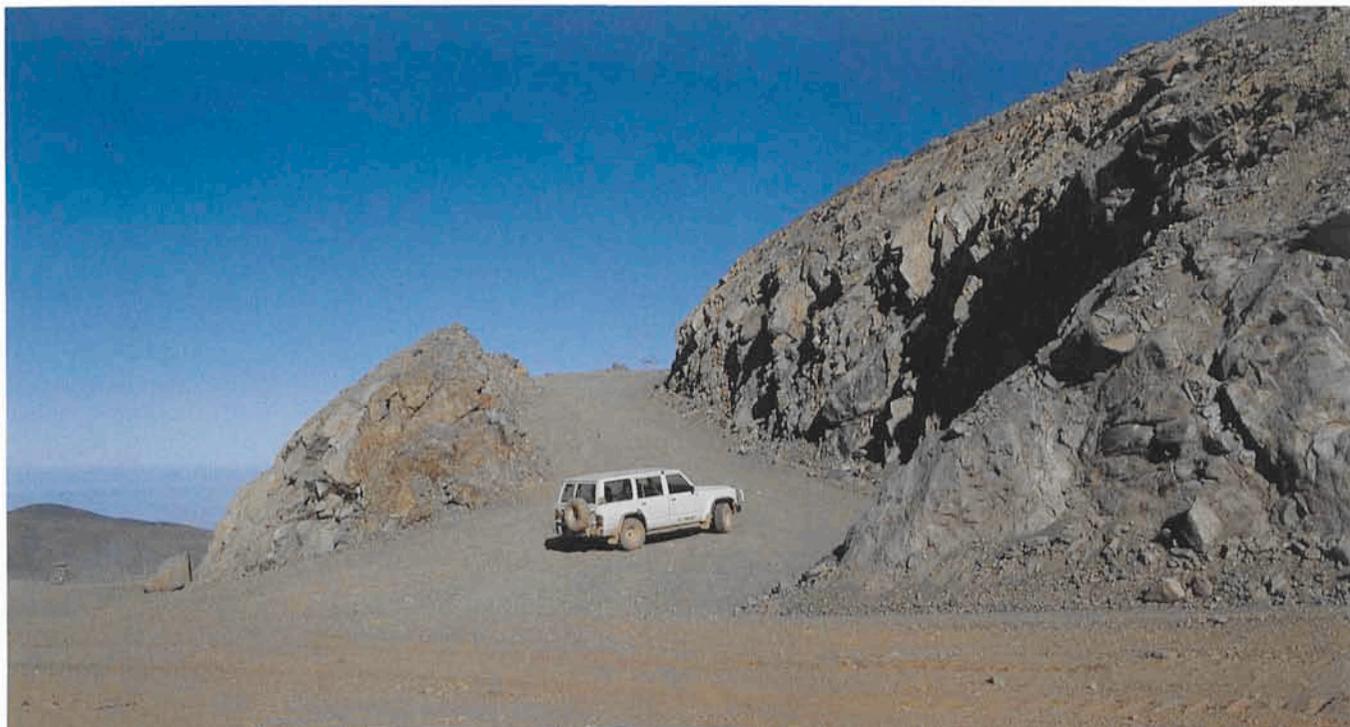


Paranal

(October 1992)

Picture 1: Paranal as seen from the NTT-peak. The truck, visible at the top, gives an idea about the dimension of the platform. – Picture 2: The new shape of the mountain clearly stands out against the deep blue sky. – Picture 3: Access road to the VLT control building. – Picture 4: Upper part of the access road leading to the platform. – Picture 5: Sunset light illuminates the wall of an excavation for a telescope basement. – Picture 6: Excavation for the basement of Telescope Unit 4 – Picture 7: Excavators at work.

Photos by H. ZODET, ESO



The principles of freedom of association for their staff are implemented in international organizations exclusively through their own legal system which, in case of ESO, recognizes the jurisdiction of the Administrative Tribunal of the International Labour Organization in the case of disputes between the organization and its staff.

At ESO this legal system consists of the Combined Staff Rules and the Local Staff Regulations which foresee the election of staff representatives for the interaction with the Executive.

At the same time ESO has no objection to local staff being members of national trade unions. Such unions can, however, not become the recognized discussion partner in matters of the local staff.

It must be emphasized that the International Labour Organization has confirmed ESO's position.

International organizations employ local and international staff. International staff at ESO, as in many other International Organizations, is recruited and remunerated on a different basis to that of local staff. At the same time, following a long-standing Council policy, the remuneration of the ESO local staff is based on the level of the best-paying employers in Chile.

The Local Staff Regulations are at present under revision and will be discussed in a specially appointed Working Group of the Finance Committee starting in January 1993. The proposed revision of the Local Staff Regulations has been discussed with a special Local Staff Advisory Committee and local staff representatives will participate in the work of this Working Group.

G. BACHMANN, ESO

Preparation of Paranal

In November the Interbeton contract for the levelling and landscaping of the Paranal site of the VLT Observatory was completed with the signature of the protocol of acceptance of the work.

The top of the mountain now presents a plateau 2632 m above sea level in which specific excavations for the foundation of the four 8-m telescopes and the control building were dug out. A total volume of about 350 000 m³ of rocks was removed during one year of hectic activity and the result is illustrated in the pictures presented in this issue of the *Messenger*. Immediately after the conclusion of the Interbeton work a geological and geotechnical investigation of the characteristics of the soil at the location of the telescopes and control building was started by Prof. Antoine of the University of Grenoble.

The main conclusions confirm the early results established in the previous explorations when one considers both the geological model for the foundation of each telescope and the estimated geotechnical characteristics of the rock masses involved.

Foundation conditions are excellent for all four telescopes. The presence of an important strip of much foliated diorite at the location of telescope No. 4 is not worrying for the stability, even if it is impressive when looking at the map. The main reasons are, firstly, the strongly reinforced concrete foundation slab acts as a bridge stepping over the shear zone and secondly, the settlements to be expected on such a zone, if they are

about ten times more than those of massive rocks, remain very small with no consequences for the concrete.

The stability of the foundation slabs with respect to sliding under seismic effects is widely insured.

The control building also presents excellent conditions with respect to the small loads to be exerted on the footings, and the dip of the rock layers towards the heart of the slope which is very favourable.

Mining Activities

ESO has been informed of a plan, exploring the possibility of a large-surface salpeter mine to be opened in the south/south-east of Paranal outside the ESO property at a distance of approximately 21 km from Paranal.

Explorations have been terminated and one is waiting now for the investment decision of the owners of this mine before starting possible exploitation. The possible effects of dust and light pollution on Paranal are presently being studied. In this connection it is noted that 85 % of the wind is in the north-south direction and only a small portion of the dust, and under unfavourable conditions, may drift to the north at altitudes which are not yet clearly determined.

The mine has already informed ESO that it is willing to discuss protective measures in favour of the observatory, should it be decided to start exploitation of the mine.

M. TARENGHI, ESO

ESO to Help Central and Eastern European Astronomers

The Council of the European Southern Observatory¹, meeting at the ESO Headquarters in Garching on December 1-2, 1992, has decided to initiate a Programme by this organization, aimed at supporting some of the scientifically most active and internationally highly esteemed astronomical institutes and research groups in Central and Eastern Europe (C&EE).

Earlier this year, the ESO Council established a special Working Group to provide advice about ESO's future rela-

tions with C&EE astronomy under the recent changes in Europe. At the same time, there have been numerous reports about the steadily and dramatically worsening situation of astronomy in these countries, even the possible demise of some of the C&EE institutes and observatories. In many places it now seems that astronomy is in a particularly difficult situation when compared to some of the more applied sciences.

Following consultations with many individual C&EE and West European astronomers and authorities, the Council Working Group concluded that immediate action should be taken by ESO. It recommended that a diversified programme of support to some of the sci-

entifically most active institutes and research groups in the C&EE be initiated.

The Council agreed that ESO, as the major European astronomy organization, and with its many links to individual researchers, scientific institutes and observatories as well as to policy makers, is in an optimal position to assess objectively the very diverse needs and to provide support to C&EE astronomy in a non-bureaucratic and cost-effective way.

The Council resolved that a total of up to 500,000 DM from the ESO budget will be made available for this purpose during each of the next three years. Still, it is obvious that ESO within its limited means can only muster a small fraction

¹ The Council of ESO consists of two representatives from each of the eight member States. It is the highest authority of the organization and normally meets twice a year.