



• Paranal  
• La Silla  
• La Serena  
• Santiago

## Report from the Council Meeting

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The ESO Council meeting that took place in Milano on November 28–29, 1995, was of great importance to the organisation for the number and complexity of the issues that were discussed and the decisions that were reached.

I thought I would comment on some of the highlights as a means of informing the European Astronomical Community of significant developments.

### Programmatic and Financial Matters

The Council was brought up to date on the very considerable progress which had occurred in all aspects of the VLT project. The Council members were able to see with their own eyes and touch the 430-ton mechanical structure of one of the VLT unit telescopes just assembled in the Ansaldo factory in Milano.

They also received reports on the successful delivery of the first 8.2-m mirror at REOSC in Paris, a few weeks before, and the satisfactory progress of all other aspects of the technical developments of the VLT telescopes.

The successful development of significant portions of software was, for instance, vividly demonstrated through its application at the NTT (see article by Jason Spyromilio in this issue of *The Messenger*). Programmatic reports on the development of the most important sub-units were normally accompanied by photographic or videotape reports.

Particularly important in this respect was the visual demonstration on the completion of the civil engineering works on Paranal and the degree of progress on the erection of the telescope enclosures.

From the point of view of schedule and cost, the Executive could report that notwithstanding the delay imposed on the construction by the legal issues in Chile, the official first light could still occur in the first half of 1998, although internal contingency had been severely eroded. The projected costs of VLT at completion were also reported to remain within the agreed budget, although internal contingencies had been substantially reduced due to losses associated to the programmatic delays in Chile.

This financial and schedule status report was embodied in the written VLT semi-annual report which is currently based on the Work Break Down Structure (WBS) and Management Information System (MIS) tools.

I believe it is fair to say that the Council received these reports with great satisfaction because they portray a healthy, stable and resilient programme which was able to absorb technical and political mishaps and respond positively and effectively.

The reports on all other aspects of ESO also showed an organisation which is successfully reengineering itself while carrying out its tasks and

achieving the Council mandated savings in operations with good margins.

As a result, the Council was in a position to approve the 1996 budget proposed by the Finance Committee, as well as the use of the 1997–1999 financial projections as a base for planning. Furthermore, Council tackled and resolved the knotty problem of cash flow created by the demand for large payments to contractors upon delivery of the main components of VLT.

In an important resolution the Council authorised the Director General to open a line of credit in the banking sector to be used for the VLT programme, only as required, with a fixed amount of no more than 40% of one yearly contribution. This credit is to be completely refunded by the year 2003 and in any case to be kept to a minimum by several means. Member states willing to make an advanced contribution could completely avoid the loan alternative and reduce the required amount. The Executive is pledged to a total saving of 20 MDM in operating expenses over the period 1995–1998 and is required to absorb the losses due to delays in Chile within the VLT programme. The Member States committed themselves to a minimum constant contribution (inflation adjusted) for the period 1996–2002.

By these decisions the Council has created the necessary conditions for the successful completion of the technical part of the VLT programme.



## Relations with Chile and other States

Another important decision by the ESO Council was essential to assure the operation of the VLT on Paranal in Chile.

As part of the settlement of the claims by the La Torre family against the Government of Chile regarding the ownership of Paranal at the time of the donation, the Chilean Government will disburse approximately 10 MDM to the claimant.

While willing to make this effort in reaching this agreement, the Government of Chile required from the ESO Council some assurance that, after the settlement, ESO would not seek further damages to repay for the losses suffered.

The direct losses to ESO linked to scientific contractors had been reduced to a sum of about 8 MDM.

The Council resolved to forego these claims, with appropriate assurance to be given to the Government of Chile, at the time of exchange of the instruments of ratification of the new "Accuerdo".

As mentioned above, the Council also decided that no increase in the run out

costs of VLT to compensate for the losses should be granted to the Executive, resulting therefore in additional savings required in the VLT programme.

As a result of this action, the legal proceedings regarding Paranal could be concluded on January 12, 1996 and the "Accuerdo" has been submitted for its ratification in Parliament by Chile on January 16, 1996.

It is important to point out that even without the ratification of "Accuerdo" the legal basis of ESO ownership of Paranal is now settled. Our relations with the Chilean Government are excellent, with strong assurances at the highest level of the Government of the desire of Chile to have ESO develop VLT on Paranal.

Significant steps were also taken by the Council with regard to the discussions related to new memberships. A general resolution about new members was accompanied by the appointment of an ESO Negotiating Team to initiate discussions with Australia and Spain.

Since then the Government of Australia has also formally named a negotiating team and preliminary discussions have started (February 5, 1996). The Government of Spain has expressed interest in starting the process (January 19, 1996).

## Concluding Remarks

Many other significant issues were discussed and acted upon during this Council Meeting.

I would like to recall the discussion of the "Chile Operating Plan in the VLT era", the endorsement of the Chile reorganisation plan effective since December 1, 1995, the appointment of Daniel Hofstadt, Jorge Melnick and Massimo Tarenghi to head respectively the Santiago, the La Silla and the Paranal operations.

Also, I would like to mention the important report by the STC on "La Silla 2000" and the discussions regarding the forthcoming visit of the ESO Visiting Committee.

These matters have been and will be taken up in greater detail during the course of the year in future issues of *The Messenger*.

Finally, I should note actions of Council in the re-appointment of Dr. Peter Creola as President of Council, Dr. Jean-Pierre Swings as Vice President of Council, Dr. J. Gustavsson as Chairman of the Finance Committee, Dr. Steve Beckwith as Chairman of the STC, Professor Krautter as Chair of the OPC and Dr. Lequeux as Vice Chairman of the OPC.

# TELESCOPES AND INSTRUMENTATION

## VLT News

M. TARENGHI, ESO

During the past 3 months a great deal of work has been carried out on the Chilean site where the VLT is being assembled. Skanska-Belfi, the Swedish-Chilean consortium in charge of the construction of the foundations for all the buildings on the Paranal peak are in the process of terminating their activities and the Italian consortium SEBIS has completed the erection of the steel frame of the first enclosure unit. Figure 1 depicts in an impressive way the transition of the typical work associated with civil engineering activities to the work related to mechanical erection. Enclosure no. 1 in the middle of the picture is going through the last moments of the erection of the roof and a number of workers are operating in the proximity of the upper part of the structure.

The remaining pieces of the enclosure structure of no. 1 (the shutter of the enclosure) are lined up ready in pre-assembled form on the summit of Cerro Paranal on the left side of Figure no. 1. During the last week of February 1996

the external panels of enclosure no. 1 were installed and in the course of April 1996 the structure will be closed. The fixed part of enclosure no. 2 is being erected and is already visible in Figure 1.

The foundations of the third telescope have been completed and are ready for the integration of the enclosure. In telescope no. 4 (Figure no. 1) one can see the scaffolding around the foundations which was used to align the interface boxes of the enclosure structure. These units proved to be very effective with their special anti-seismic device during the course of the strong earthquake that occurred in July 1995. The steel structures for enclosures 3 and 4 left Italy by sea transport at the beginning of March. In the background of Figure 1 the steel frame structure of the control building is visible. This will be used in the lower floor for integration, laboratory and technical areas, and the upper floor will be used for the control rooms from which astronomers and technical people will perform their observations.

All the underground tunnels allowing access to the different telescopes as

well as the interferometric tunnel and the interferometric laboratories, are embedded in the ground and are already being utilised for access to the lower part of the foundations.

The impressive delay line tunnel is a remarkable feature in the centre of the figure, also the two bridges crossing the tunnel that allow the mobile 1.8-m telescopes to go from the northern to the southern side are clearly visible.

In the interior part of the foundations of telescopes 3 and 4 one can see two rings covered by blue plastic sheets protecting the two embedded beams on which the azimuth tracks of the unit telescopes will be assembled.

In March the company SPIE Bagnolles will intervene on the summit of the mountain to complete all the electrical and mechanical installations in the telescope buildings, control building and interferometric complex, and in the summer the company AES will start assembly of the first telescope structure.

Figure 2 gives more detail of the delicate phase of the lifting of the roof. The human presence inside the enclosure gives an idea of the global dimensions