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ESO Turns 40

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1962 – 2002... Four decades that changed Europe – and forty years that changed European Astronomy. One full generation of scientists, a wonderful time during which many of our dreams, our hopes, and our

goals have finally come true.

Our ancient science has always been characterized by broad international collaboration. However, it was only in the early 1950's that our illustrious predecessors, led by Jan Hendrick Oort and Walter Baade, embarked upon the arduous political process that ultimately gave birth to ESO. With great foresight and an equal measure of stubborn will, they paved the way for some of the world's best telescope and instrument facilities, the solid and durable ground for a strong and brilliant future of European Astronomy and Astrophysics.

From the construction of its first observatory at La Silla on a remote mountain top in the inhospitable Atacama desert, to the momentous Very Large Telescope at Paranal, with the construction of the ALMA project about to

start and promising perspectives for a super-giant telescope, ESO has matured to become a major player on the world scene, offering to its community a unique complement of research facilities. Always a persistent driver of front-line research, it is now the prime service organization in its field on this continent, with thousands of scientists profiting from precious data obtained with telescopes at the ESO sites. In a steady and carefully planned process, new and extremely powerful instruments and telescopes are being developed for the ESO community in close collaboration with research institutes and the high-tech industry. Innovative concepts, like the Astronomical Virtual Observatory and associated data archives with tens of Terabytes contribute to the success of European Astronomy and Astrophysics.

The challenges ahead are commensurate with the achievements of today. To meet them, ESO, a dynamic organization, is committed to continuous progress and ever-increasing efficiency. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to those who have contributed to ESO's success. I must start with

ESO's skillful and dedicated staff that brought these great projects to fruition. I also want to salute the commitment of the members of ESO Committees. I am in particular grateful for the active support over these past three years from the President of Council and from the Chairs of Finance Committee, Scientific and Technical Committee, VLT Implementation Committee, Observing Programme Committee, Users Committee and Visiting Committee, as well as from so many influential members of these Committees. And, of course, above all, I wish to thank the member countries for their enthusiastic support of ESO throughout the years.

