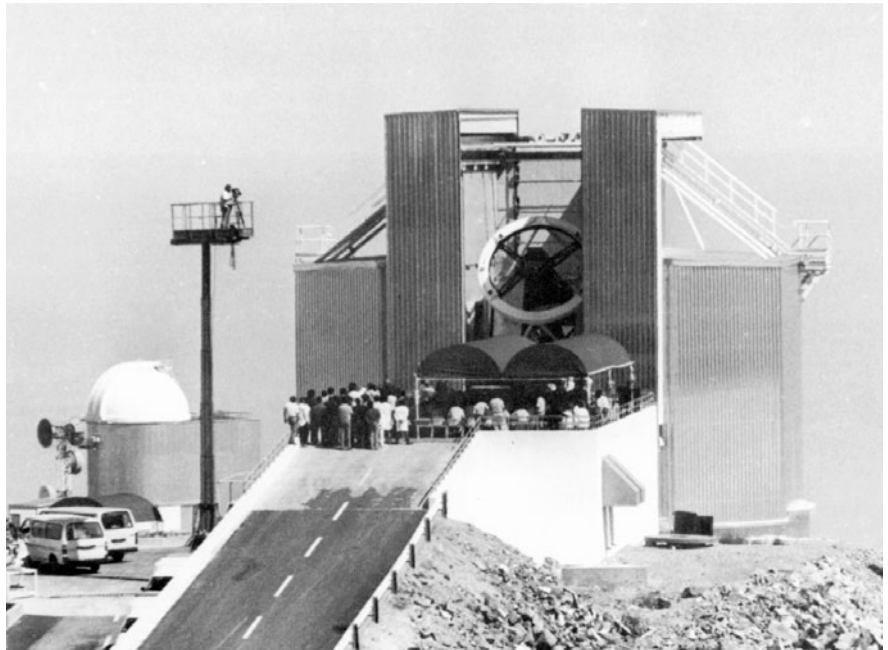


The VLT, even its VLTI-mode, is not the end of ESO's journey; rather their quality brightens the prospects for further ambitions that reach for the stars. A key role in ALMA is called for and is bound to unfold in the next twenty years. OWL is a dream as the VLT was twenty years ago. Twenty years from now it shall, in some rendition reminiscent of the current dream, amaze the world once more. Because 'A vision is a dream with a deadline'.

ESO was Jan Oort's vision fifty years ago. This vision had great power and has propelled our community to a sequence of extraordinary achievements. With ESO, Europe is first to reach for ultimate frontiers. It's what our political leaders in a recent Lisbon summit called for.

On February 6, 1990, the ESO NTT was officially inaugurated.



RICCARDO GIACCONI, ESO Director General, 1993–1999

I feel privileged in having had the opportunity to lead ESO during a period of great innovation and expansion. Building on thirty years of heritage, working together with an extremely competent staff and with the full support and cooperation of the ESO member states, we were successful in many endeavours. They include the construction of the Very Large Telescope and the development of Paranal, the mod-

ernization of the La Silla Telescopes, the introduction of new managerial and scientific methodology, the expansion of the Education and Public Outreach programmes and the start of the VLT interferometry development. By achieving success in all these areas we established ESO as a model for optical ground-based facilities around the world and redefined the role of ESO in European astronomy.

Today ESO is busily proceeding in the scientific exploitation of the VLT, in completing development of VLTI and is cooperating on a 50/50 basis with the US and Canada on the Atacama Large Millimeter Array, the largest ground-based astronomy programme yet undertaken. I am confident that ESO can lead an international cooperative effort on the next-generation overwhelmingly large telescope (OWL).

CATHERINE CESARSKY, Present ESO Director General

I arrived at ESO at a very interesting time. I had the privilege of witnessing the first light of Melipal and Yepun, of overseeing the installation of UVES, NACO, VIMOS and FLAMES at the focus of VLT telescopes, and of celebrating the first fringes of VLTI, first with siderostats and then with 8-m telescopes. The harvest of scientific results with the two FORS, ISAAC and UVES is already impressive, and the efficiency of the Paranal Observatory is astounding. ISAAC and UVES both have features unequalled at any other telescope; with NACO, we have the best adaptive optics instrument ever, nearly ready to be offered to our community, while VIMOS and FLAMES are showing their promise in the current commissioning activities. The VLT archive is open and attracts more and more users, a good omen for the Astrophysical Virtual Observatory. Meanwhile, the La Silla Observatory has also been very productive and has undergone huge improvements, coming closer and closer to VLT standards.

In parallel, these three years have been filled with work and meetings in preparation for the next large project, ALMA. Wide collaboration with the European millimetre and submillimetre wave observatories and laboratories, use of all the available expertise and pooling of the forces, and a well coordinated sharing of tasks with our American colleagues, have brought about considerable progress of the project during Phase 1. Now, Phase 2 is about to be launched. Negotiations with the USA and Canada, Chile, Spain and Japan are all converging on time.

Also, faithful to its original purpose, ESO is preparing the long-term future in ground optical/infrared astronomy, with the conceptual study of the OWL 100-m telescope. All these developments – from VLT instruments to VLTI to ALMA and in the future studies for Extremely Large Telescopes – require and foster an ever-growing involvement of other European groups, who are no longer just users but also full fledged collaborators.

The past three years have seen the emergence of ESO as a major player on the European scientific scene, in which role it is actively contributing to the establishment of the European Research Area advocated by Commissioner Busquin. The organization has acquired two new member states, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Council has unanimously endorsed a long-range plan allowing continuing the deployment of VLT and VLTI while starting the construction of ALMA on an equal partnership with North America. Several other countries are considering or negotiating admission to ESO, and in the mean time Spain is participating in ALMA with the ESO member states. Contacts and exchanges with six scientific European organizations and with the European Union have been strengthened through the creation of EIROFORUM; with ESA in particular the cooperation has been greatly enhanced in the perspective of a tighter coordination of space- and ground-based astronomical research.