



● La Silla
● La Serena
● Santiago

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Switzerland, Member of ESO . . .

On March 1, 1982, the Federal Council of Switzerland submitted its signed ESO membership document to the French Foreign Ministry (where the ESO documents are kept). With this act Switzerland's ESO membership becomes effective.

This brings to a happy end a complex development which began sixteen years ago, when the Swiss Council for Science Policy recommended that Switzerland should build its own observatory on Gornergrat above Zermatt. When it was realized that this project posed several unsurmountable problems, Swiss astronomers joined forces to work toward Switzerland's becoming a member of ESO. The momentum in this direction grew through the subsequent recommendation of the Swiss Council of Science Policy (1972) and the erection of the Geneva telescope on La Silla (approved by the ESO Council in 1975, and reluctantly again in 1977).

In 1979, direct talks between Swiss government representatives and the Director-General of ESO, as well as contacts between the Italian and Swiss governments culminated in the acceptance by the ESO Council of Switzerland and Italy as new member countries (March 1980).

The driving forces within Switzerland became more and more the Federal Office for Education and Science and the Foreign Ministry. The latter drew up a message to Parliament, which was approved by the Federal Council in December 1980, and which was adopted by the two Chambers, without an opposing vote, in June and September, respectively, of the following year. After a three-month referendum period, which was not used, the Federal Council put its final signature on the ESO document on February 3, 1982.

Switzerland will pay an entrance fee of about 5 million Swiss francs and an annual contribution of about 2 million Swiss francs. It is planned to use the Swiss entrance fee together with the Italian one for the construction of a new telescope on La Silla to meet the increased demand on the already heavily loaded telescopes.

The Federal Council has named Dr. Peter Creola from the Foreign Ministry and Prof. Marcel Golay from the Geneva Observatory as Delegates to the ESO Council, with Mr. C. Peter from the Federal Office for Education and Science as an advisor. The ESO Council has appointed Prof. G. A. Tammann of the Basel Observatory into the Scientific/Technical Committee. The Swiss members of the Finance Committee, the Observing Programmes Committee, and the User's Committee are still to be named.

Felix, faustum, fortunatumque sit!

G. A. T.

. . . and Italy will Follow Soon

At the moment of going to press we are informed that the Italian Parliament on March 2, 1982 definitely approved the adhesion of Italy to ESO. Italy will become a member of ESO as soon as the document of adhesion is deposited with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We welcome this imminent happy event.

The ESO Scientific and Technical Committee

P. Léna, Observatoire de Meudon, Chairman of the STC

Since 1978, the structure of ESO involves a Scientific and Technical Committee (STC) which advises the Council on scientific and technical matters. This committee meets twice a year, usually at Garching; its members are nominated by the Council and their term is 4 years. The STC has 10 members,

who are as evenly distributed as possible among member countries, although indeed mainly chosen for their scientific abilities. The chairman is invited to attend Council meetings and to report to the members.

In the three past years, the STC has essentially dealt with

prospective activities, a role fairly similar in this respect to the one played within the European Space Agency by the Astronomy Working Group. Important decisions, such as to implement two new telescopes (3.5 m NTT and 2.2 m) at La Silla, or to house the European Coordinating Facility of the Space Telescope, were taken by the Council. Given the growing complexity of astronomy with respect to instruments as well as to telescopes, the STC should relay the wishes, needs and various competences of the European community: e.g. for the NTT project, the main options such as telescope design, focal plane configuration, mode of operation, instrumentation, optimization with respect to the 3.6 m use are currently discussed.

Another task of the STC is to follow the progress of ESO built-in instrumentation. Given the long lead-time of such projects—even worse in the past two years due to the move to Garching—the work here is very prospective indeed, and is usually substantiated by workshops. To propose such meetings at European scale, in close cooperation with the ESO staff, is an initiative often taken by STC members who, here also, may channel wishes and needs of the community (a few examples in the past years: Abundance Determination for Stars, Two-Dimensional Photometry, Infrared Astronomy . . .). Among instruments, let us mention the new IRSPEC cryogenic spectrograph born at the first ESO infrared workshop held in Utö (Sweden) in 1978. It will only be in one or two years that the STC will be able to resume a new development phase, once the current set of instruments under construction is completed. The purchase of expensive items, such as array detectors, computers . . . is also being discussed by the STC who has to approve it. Another prospective and important subject in the past two

years has been the preliminary study for the Very Large Telescope (VLT): the matter is important as it is clearly illustrated by the successive conferences (Geneva 1976, Tucson 1980, Garching 1981, Tucson 1982) being held and by the very broad range of options under discussion. It is clear that ESO, with the backing of almost the whole Europe, can play there a significant role. Apart from the full support given by the STC to the Garching Conference, the matter is discussed regularly: Among other crucial issues which will need a continuing debate, is the spatial interferometry and coherence capability of such a large venture. Given the growing costs of astronomical projects, the variety of options (visible, IR, radio, space), it becomes difficult to make sound choices in a context of economic difficulties. The STC should be the right place to reflect the will and opinions of European astronomers.

Apart from STC members' personal experience, the day-to-day life of ESO, especially at La Silla, is less reflected in the STC concerns, leaving this heavy responsibility to the Director-General advised by the Users Committee and the Observing Programmes Committee. The situation might be different if some STC meetings could occur at La Silla or if the director at La Silla could attend STC meetings, a less expensive proposal I made at the last Council meeting.

As emphasized in this brief report, I believe that the STC is already and should be in the future a place of confrontation of ideas and options, even if they appear sometimes as very unorthodox, as the debate on whether ESO should build a mm radio telescope at La Silla, use concrete spherical mounts for the NTT or operate telescopes in Chile in a completely remote manner.

Social Activity in the Outer Atmosphere of La Silla

Sonia Rodríguez-Larraín, ESO, La Silla

Who would believe that there exists another form of life—a social life—in this dark nebula of El Norte Chico? One would immediately assume that in an environment where noise, lights, wine and other types of pollution have been banned deliberately, the swinging species could not evolve in their party-going and mirth. That the sole survivors could only be those vague, unworldly non-drinkers, whose only concern is to generate work and publish it.

And yet . . . wrong. The will to enjoy life's more mundane side is not in quiescence for all in this Observatory. The fittest have managed to survive.

The first sign that not all is as prosaic as one would tend to believe in these austere surroundings is the pass-word: "the Bar is open". Certainly those words are not lacking in poetic beauty. Surely that is what is meant by "preparing for the night ahead".

The Bar is a tradition that has survived despite the fact that it is frequented by very few steadies and plenty of new-comers. Any reason is good enough to open the Bar: going on home-leave, getting a new contract, getting a new hair-cut . . .

And while on the subject of traditions and new-comers, it is a Chilean custom that within a month's time of being hired, the new employee has to *pagar el piso* and invite his new colleagues to show what a great pal he is going to turn out to be. These social gatherings normally take place at the beginning of a *turno* since provisions start running low as the days go by. Good music, great dancers, plenty of provisions. It's all there, except for the fact that La Silla is rather short on girls. Let's admit it, there are only half a dozen and all are not always on the

mountain at the same time. Yet if you look at it from another angle, this handicap has its advantages. No girl can possibly feel she is left out, or that she is not popular enough. She is absolutely guaranteed, at every party, that she will not miss a single dance. Not a chance. Whether she wants it that way or not. "Wall-flowers" are unheard of on La Silla.

The only time there are plenty of girls on the mountain is when a school for young ladies from Coquimbo announces a cultural (?) visit. Suddenly there are as many volunteers for guides as there are visitors, not counting the mother superior.



"Si vas para Chile" . . .