ESO VLT Delegation Visits 6-m Telescope

At the invitation of the Special Astrophysical Observatory (SAO) of the USSR Academy of Sciences, a small ESO delegation (Enard, Schneermann, West and Wilson) recently visited the 6-metre telescope which is installed near Zelenchukskaja, in northern Caucasus. It is at present the world's largest optical telescope and constitutes an interesting reference for those who are planning the construction of the VLT, the world's largest telescope of the future. The ESO delegation was warmly received by the Director of SAO, Dr. V.L. Afanasiev and the vice-Director, Dr. L.I. Snezhko, and was lodged in the guesthouse, near the 6-m building, about 2100 metres above sea level.

Detailed discussions were held about the construction and use of large telescopes. The ESO people gave comprehensive talks about the European Southern Observatory and its Very Large Telescope project and were in turn informed about various technical aspects and scientific programmes at the 6-m telescope. A detailed inspection of the alt-az telescope, including the enormous bearings and the Nasmyth foci platforms, gave useful hints to the ESO engineers. Their SAO counterparts were pleased to share their extensive experience, gained during more than 15 years, and to point out those particular
problem areas which must be con-
sidered, when ESO embarks on the con-
struction of its VLT.
The weather was cooperative and
there was ample opportunity to watch
the astronomical observations which
concentrated on IDS spectroscopy of
the nuclei of active galaxies. SAO has
recently adopted a flexible scheduling
system, in which several programmes
with different seeing requirements are
on simultaneous standby. This system
appears to have contributed to a more
efficient exploitation of the available ob-
serving time.
The ESO delegation was interested to
learn about the Soviet plans in connec-
tion with future large telescopes and the
desire to continue the exchange of ex-
perience in such matters. There is little
doubt that with the development of new
astronomical sites in the USSR, in par-
ticular in the high mountains of central
Asia, astronomy in this country can look
forward to a large observational poten-
tial.
After the stay at the 6-m telescope,
the ESO people travelled to the other
side of Caucasus and during a brief visit
to Tbilisi, they had talks with colleagues
from the Abastumani Astrophysical Ob-
servatory of the Georgian Academy of
Sciences. Under the directorship of
Academician E.K. Kharadze, plans are
now under way for the installation of a
large optical telescope at this observa-
tory. Although the time was short, the
ESO people were also given the oppor-
tunity to experience the legendary Geor-
gian hospitality.
We owe sincere thanks to our hosts
for making this visit so useful and pleas-
ant.
R.M.W.

Major Film About Astronomy to be Produced

A major film about astronomy, telling
the story of this science from Antiquity
to our days and including a detailed
overview of modern astrophysical re-
search, is now being prepared by a
French producer, with the support of the
French Ministry of Education, La Villette,
French television and other organiza-
tions. In view of the importance of this
ambitious international project, which is
carried out with the active collaboration
of several well-known European as-
tronomers, the European Southern Ob-
servatory has offered to provide advice
and services during extensive shooting
sessions at the La Silla observatory and
also at the Headquarters in Garching.
The project aims at a 6-hour series
which will be shown on television in
several countries. An associated, large
(travel) exhibition and a comprehensive
written documentation (book) will also
be prepared. The work of astronomers,
their celestial discoveries and the life at
astronomical institutions, with buildings
and instruments will be described.
In order to bring this project to a suc-
cessful conclusion, the film people are
now in the process of establishing con-
tacts with observatories all over the
world and they would greatly appreciate
any material (brochures, photos, etc.) at
the following address: Mr. R. Pansard-
Besson (Les Productions Berthemont),
47, rue de Rennes, F-75006 Paris,
France.
The editors regret that the wrong insti-
tute was indicated after the name of
D. Heynderickx (The Messenger No. 47,
March 1987, p. 26). The correct affiliation
is: Astronomisch Instituut, Katholieke
Universiteit Leuven, Belgium.