



Munich

Europe Decides to Build the World's Largest Optical Telescope

On December 8, 1987, the ESO Council gave the green light to the ESO 16-metre Very Large Telescope (VLT), an extraordinary astronomers' dream and an amazing engineering challenge. The VLT is to be the largest telescope in the world and Europe's superior eye to the Universe.

The representatives of the eight member states (Belgium, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland) agreed that the European Southern Observatory shall embark upon the realization of this marvellous instrument. This decision expresses Europe's confidence in the ambition of her astronomical community and the ingenuity of her high-tech industry; together they will ensure that Europe will be second to none in the exploration of the Universe for a long time to come. The VLT is an essential complement of Europe's astronomical research activities from space vehicles.

Further information about the VLT will be found on pages 28–32 and 53–55.

ESO's Directors General: Retrospect and Prospect

PROF. LODEWIJK WOLTJER

Now that my thirteen years as Director General of ESO are coming to a close, I wish to briefly review where the Organization stands today and what the outlook for the future is.

ESO has experienced a great expansion: upon the realization of the 3.6 m, CAT and 1.5 m Danish telescopes, several new projects were started. The installation of the 2.2 m telescope on loan from the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft and of the 15 m SEST has been accomplished, while the 3.5 m NTT is approaching completion. As major instruments CES, CASPEC, IRSPEC and EFOSC have been built, while EMMI, DISCO and IRAC are on their way. With regard to the present class of telescopes and instruments, ESO is therefore in good shape and in a very competitive position internationally. The construction of the VLT will ensure that this remains so in the future.

The idea of the VLT arose in 1977, a bit before the first ESO large telescope conference in Geneva. The next year, various

PROF. HARRY VAN DER LAAN

In the June 1987 issue of the *Messenger*, Professor Lodewijk Woltjer wrote the leading article under the heading: A Time for Change. Now, six months later, he passes the ESO reins to me, just when a new milestone has been firmly anchored, a milestone to mark the beginning of a new chapter in European astronomy. In a parallel article, Lo Woltjer summarizes what ESO has become and to whose key contributions we owe its present state and its perspectives.

In a broad discussion with Council before my appointment, we agreed that ESO's assignment in the next ten years is threefold: (i) to operate the La Silla Observatory; (ii) to further develop ESO as a meeting place and communications centre for astronomical research in Europe; (iii) to build the Very Large Telescope. Clearly these tasks are interdependent and if carefully managed, each of them will help the others. It is also not farfetched to imagine that the engineering design and construction of the VLT could so dominate ESO's next