ESO, the European Southern Observatory, was created in 1962 to "... establish and operate an astronomical observatory in the southern hemisphere, equipped with powerful instruments, with the aim of furthering and organising collaboration in astronomy..." It is supported by eleven countries: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. ESO operates at three sites in the Atacama desert region of Chile. The Very Large Telescope (VLT), is located on Paranal, a 2,600 m high mountain approximately 130 km south of Antofagasta. The VLT consists of four 8.2 metre diameter telescopes. These telescopes can be used separately, or in combination as a giant interferometer (VLTI). At La Silla, 600 km north of Santiago de Chile at 2,400 m altitude, ESO operates several optical telescopes with diameters up to 3.6 m. The third site is the 5,000 m high Llano de Chajnantor, near San Pedro de Atacama. Here a new submillimetre telescope (APEX) is being completed, and a large submillimetrewave array of 64 antennas (ALMA) is under development. Over 1300 proposals are made each year for the use of the ESO telescopes. The ESO headquarters are located in Garching, near Munich, Germany. This is the scientific, technical and administrative centre of ESO where technical development programmes are carried out to provide the Paranal and La Silla observatories with the most advanced instruments. ESO employs about 320 international staff members, Fellows and Associates in Europe and Chile, and about 160 local staff members in Chile.

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CONTENTS

C. CESARSKY – ESO Welcomes Finland as Eleventh Member State
TELESCOPES AND INSTRUMENTATION P.O. LAGAGE ET AL. – Successful Commissioning of VISIR: the Mid-Infrared VLT Instrument .12 H. BONNET ET AL. – First Light of SINFONI at the VLT
REPORTS FROM OBSERVERS R. CHINI ET AL. – The Birth of a Massive Star
OTHER ASTRONOMICAL NEWS D. ALLOIN – Students at ESO/Santiago: The Period 1999-2004
ANNOUNCEMENTS68A. Renzini - A New Start for Public Surveys

Front Cover Picture: The Birth of a Massive Star

Three-colour ISAAC mosaic of the star forming region M 17. The field size is about 7×7 arc minutes, the effective spatial resolution is about 0.6 arc seconds; wavelength coding: blue 1.25 μ m, green 1.65 μ m, red 2.2 μ m. See the article by R. Chini et al. on page 36.