of the project, which should become available for experiments in 2007. W. Gelletley spoke on the broad perspectives, challenges and opportunities in nuclear physics, including the upcoming new experimental facilities. A different kind of huge project, the first experimental fusion reactor (ITER), was described as part of F. Wagner's comprehensive overview of the current state of plasma physics.

Possible variations in the fundamental "constants" of physics also generated a lot of interest. Recent VLT data have contradicted earlier claims of the fine structure constant having been smaller in the early universe than today. M. Murphy summarised this controversy and described ongoing efforts to resolve it. E. Reinhold reported on recent progress in trying to detect a change in the proton-to-electron mass ratio, also using VLT data.

The importance of dark energy to modern physics was emphasised by several speakers. Its existence was first established through observations of distant type Ia supernovae and the talks by R. Pain and J. Sollerman demonstrated that searching for these transient events remains a vigorous industry. They outlined the two main projects in this field: SNLS and ESSENCE. Understanding the nature of dark energy was the subject of several theoretical talks, involving D-branes (P. Gusin), Casimir Energy (R. Garattini), quantum gravity (A. Ernest and C. Bryja) and Modified Chaplygin Gas (U. Debnath).

Finally, J. Liske outlined plans to use OWL, the VLT's successor, for the Cosmic Dynamics Experiment (CODEX). The aim is to supplement our knowledge of the universe's *geometry* (derived from the microwave background and supernovae) with an unprecedented measurement of its *dynamics* and hence to provide us with a fundamental consistency check of General Relativity.

The sampling above gives some idea of the wide range of physics and cosmology that was covered at the conference. The full proceedings of the conference will become available; they will be published by the ESA Publications Division as ESA Special Publication SP-605.

ESO Public Activities in July 2005

Ed Janssen (ESO)

The month of July is, in many parts of Europe, considered to be a relatively "quiet time" of the year with many millions of people away on summer vacation. Not so for ESO's Public Affairs Department. The month began with a series of press activities around the Deep Impact event and included several press conferences at the ESO Headquarters (mostly at odd hours!), video press conferences with Paranal, La Silla and ESTEC in the Netherlands, live TV transmissions from ESO Garching as well as from Paranal, etc.

In parallel, from July 4–8 the Joint European and National Astronomy Meeting (JENAM) took place at the Amphithéâtres de l'Europe in Liège, Belgium. The meeting, organised this year by the Astronomy Department of the Liège University, had the theme "Distant Worlds". It was attended by over 200 astronomers. The meeting also enjoyed a good media attendance, probably also due to the Deep Impact Mission. As at previous JENAM meetings, ESO maintained an information stand in the lobby area and participated in the press conference.

Several ESO staff members gave talks, including the ESO DG, Françoise Delplancke, Henri Boffin, Maximilian Kraus and Marc Sarazin. Furthermore, a Round Table was held to discuss financing, organisation and industrial aspects of large European astronomical projects. It was chaired by Lodewijk Woltjer, former ESO director general. From ESO Roberto Gilmozzi participated as a speaker.

On July 7, ESO participated in a major Press Event on the Future of Astronomy Research Infrastructures, organised by the European Commission and hosted by JIVE, in Dwingeloo, the Netherlands. The event was attended by EC Research Commissioner Janez Potocnik and Maria van der Hoeven, Dutch Minister for

Prof. Jean Surdej, one of the local organisers, being interviewed by RTL television at the JENAM conference.

Photo: E. Janssen, ESO

Photo: JIVE

EU Commissioner Dr. Janez Potocnik and Mrs. Maria van der Hoeven, Dutch Minister for Education, Culture and Science answer questions from the media representatives at the press meeting in Dwingeloo.

Education, Culture and Science. About 60 science journalists from across the EU attended, together with coordinators of the various astronomical projects supported by the EC, including RadioNet, OPTICON, EUROPLANET, ILIAS, the ELT Design Study, the SKA Design Study, the ALMA Enhancement Programme and VO-TECH. ESO displayed an information stand, which was well visited and appreciated by both the participants and the media.

A few days later, from July 11–14 ESO had an exhibition at the University of Berne, in connection with "EPS 13". (see page 60). At the end of the conference, on July 15, an Open Day on Physics and Society was co-organised with the Swiss Academy of Sciences and the Swiss Physical Society. In the context of a joint EIROforum presentation, ESO participated by means of a live video conference with ESO Paranal, moderated by Barbara Vonarburg, well-known Swiss science journalist and Rolf Landua from CERN.

ESO staff astronomer Thomas Szeifert answers questions at the EPS 13 Open House videoconference at the University of Berne.

Photos: E. Janssen, ESO (2)

Prof. Jean-Philippe Ansernet, President of the Swiss Physical Society, Prof. Martin Huber, outgoing President of the European Physical Society, Dr. C. Rossel, Conference coordinator, and Dr. Ingrid Kissling-Näf, Director of the Swiss Academy of Sciences at the EPS 13 Conference venue.

Public Information and Education in Chile

Gonzalo Argandoña, Felix Mirabel (ESO)

One of the initiatives of ESO in Chile is the strengthening of the links with Chilean and Latin American media, to provide the information needed to educate the public in Latin America on the latest advancements in astronomy and astrophysics.

This initiative has produced a considerable increase in the media coverage of ESO science activities, as described in Figure 1, which shows the evolution in the number of media publications in Chile on recent achievements at ESO.

Certainly, the active involvement of the La Silla Paranal Observatory in the global observation campaign of Comet 9P/Tempel 1 was an excellent opportunity to further promote this strategy in a multi-approach way. A dedicated website in Spanish language (*http://www.impacto-profundo.cl*) was released in advance to emphasise the contribution of the La Silla Paranal Observatory to the long-term monitoring campaign of Comet 9P/Tempel 1. This website, that included general information about comets, became an important reference in the Spanish language for the public and journalists who covered the event.

ESO also joined the Chilean Ministry of Education to organise a national educa-