

Spain to Join ESO

On 13 February, at a ceremony in Madrid, an agreement was signed by the Spanish Minister of Education and Science, Mrs. María Jesús San Segundo, and the ESO Director General, Dr. Catherine Cesarsky, affirming their commitment to securing Spanish membership of ESO.

Following approval by the Spanish Council of Ministers and the ratification by the Spanish Parliament of the ESO Convention and the associated protocols, Spain will become ESO's twelfth member state on 1 July 2006.

“Since long Spain was aware that entering ESO was a logical decision and it was even necessary for a country like Spain because Spain is ranked eighth in astrophysical research”, said Mrs. María Jesús San Segundo. “The large scientific installations are not only necessary for research in different fields but are also partners and customers for high-tech companies, helping to increase the funding of R&D.”

“Spanish Astronomy has made tremendous strides forward and we are delighted to welcome Spain as a new member of ESO. We very much look forward to working together with our excellent Spanish colleagues”, said Dr. Cesarsky. “For ESO, the Spanish accession means that we can draw on the scientific and technological competences, some of them unique in Europe, that have been developed in Spain and, of course, for Europe the Spanish membership of ESO is an important milestone in the construction of the European Research Area.”



The Spanish Minister of Education and Science, Mrs. María Jesús San Segundo, (left) and the ESO Director General, Dr. Catherine Cesarsky (right) signing the agreement.

Indeed, Spain is an important member of the European astronomical community and has developed impressively over the last three decades, reaching maturity with major contributions in virtually all areas of astronomy. In addition, Spain hosts, operates or owns a number of competitive facilities dedicated to foster astronomical research, among which is the Observatorio del Roque de los Muchachos at La Palma, certainly the premier optical/infrared astronomical observing site in Europe and site of the Spanish 10-m GranTeCan telescope now nearing completion.

With the high quality of Spanish astronomical research as well as the technological competence of Spanish industry, it is only fitting that Spain should join ESO. Through ESO Spain will enjoy full access to all of ESO's current facilities and unrestricted participation in the projects that ESO is planning for the future. Spain is already an active partner of the Atacama Large Millimeter Array (ALMA), whose construction and operations are led by ESO on behalf of Europe.

ESO's Council approved the admission of Spain at its 107th meeting held in Garching on 7 and 8 December 2005.

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