

In Germany, ESO had a stand during the 80th Annual Scientific Meeting of the 'Astronomische Gesellschaft' (AG), which also hosted the 5th biennial Workshop on Astroparticle Physics. This event, where ESO's Director General presented the ASTRONET Science Vision, took place in Würzburg on 24–28 September and was attended by some 300 participants.

Finally, in the Netherlands, ESO was present with an information stand at the International Festival for Astronomy (IFA) that took place near Utrecht. This three-day event, which focuses on senior high school students and beyond, was organised by the Dutch Youth Working Group for Astronomy and the Royal Netherlands Society for Meteorology and Astronomy. Amongst many other interesting sessions, the winners of the Catch a Star 2007 competition, Jan Mestan and Jan Kotek from the Czech republic, gave a presentation of their trip to the Paranal Observatory.



Figure 3: Former ESA astronaut Claude Nicollier talking with Ed Janssen (ESO) in front of the ESO stand on the 1st Swiss astronomy day.

## Distinguished Visitors to Paranal

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As part of his first official trip to Brazil and Chile, the European Science and Research Commissioner, Janez Potočnik, visited the ESO Paranal Observatory on 27 November. The Commissioner was accompanied by, among others, Jaime Pérez Vidal, Head of the Delegation of the European Commission (EC) to Chile, Mary Minch and Cornelia Nauen, respectively Director and Principal Administrator of International Scientific Cooperation for the EC, and Hervé Peró, Head of EC Unit Research Infrastructures.

Figure 1: EC Commissioner Janez Potočnik at the Control-Console of the VLT.



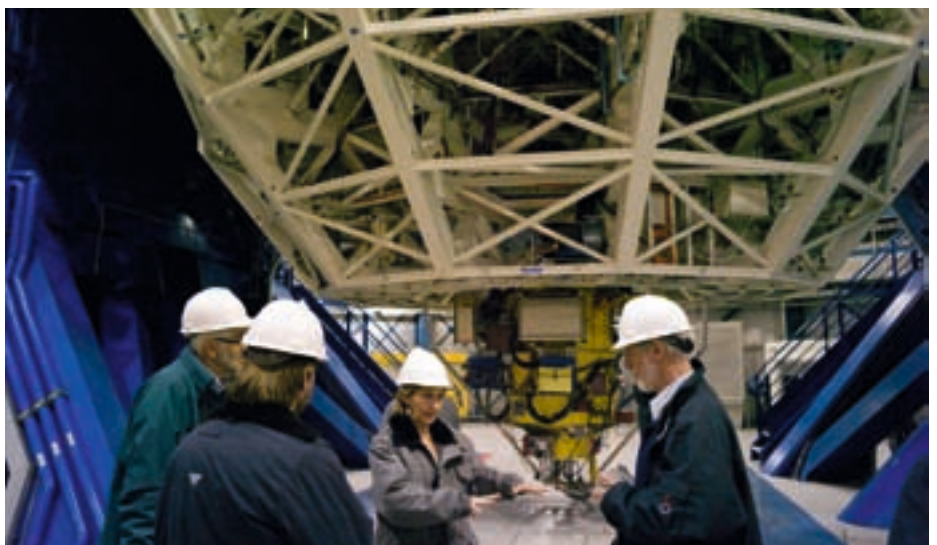
**Figure 2:** A colour composite image of the spiral galaxy NGC 134 based on images obtained in B, V, R and H- $\alpha$  filters with FORS2 during the visit of Commissioner Potočník.

The guests were welcomed by the ESO Director General, Tim de Zeeuw, the ESO Representative in Chile, Felix Mirabel, and the Director of the Paranal Observatory, Andreas Kaufer, and stayed overnight on Paranal. The Commissioner visited the VLT Control Room (see Figure 1) and participated in an observing sequence. He observed the warped spiral galaxy NGC 134 with the FORS2 instrument on Antu. Figure 2 shows a colour composite, based on the images, made after the event.

The Commissioner's visit was part of an official trip to Chile and Brazil. The EU has established a bilateral relationship with Chile and a Science and Technology agreement was signed in 2002. More information on the visit can be found in PR's 48/07 and 49/07.

A few weeks later the Regional Minister for Research of the Belgian French-speaking Community, Marie-Dominique Simonet, visited Paranal on 17th November. This was also part of a visit to Brazil and Chile, in which the Minister promoted the 'Competitivity Poles', as well as Research and Education. The Minister was accompanied by a delegation consisting of Claude Gonfroy and Jean-Luc Horward, both members of her Cabinet, Jean-Pierre Swings, former member of the ESO Council, Claude Jamar from the Centre Spatial de Liège, and Bill Collins, from the AMOS company which built the four Auxiliary Telescopes. Ten French-speaking Belgian journalists, including two TV crews, also joined the Minister for a day at Paranal. Felix Mirabel, Olivier Hainaut, Head of Science Operations at Paranal, and Ueli Weilenmann, were the ESO hosts.

The Minister visited the telescopes and facilities on site and was clearly interested, as evidenced by Figure 3. Her visit coincided with her birthday and, at the dinner, she was presented with a cake and flowers, as well as gifts from members of her delegation.



**Figure 3:** The Belgian Regional Minister of Research, Marie-Dominique Simonet, in discussion with Paranal staff inside the Kueyen dome with FORS1 in the background.