

ESO at the European City of Science

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To mark the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research decided to create a European City of Science in one of most magnificent historical buildings in Paris, the Grand Palais, on 14–16 November.

In this impressive setting, the European City of Science paid host to more than 42 000 visitors — some queuing for up to two hours to enter — all taking the opportunity to learn how the European Research Area does its work. Not only schoolchildren of all ages, but also adults, could learn about scientific and technical culture with the help of guides taking them to meet research scientists from every country in Europe. The scientific and technological perspectives were presented through the outcomes and inventions produced by the research.

The scientific community had enthusiastically rallied round the realisation of the European City of Science. Over 200 organisations (80 from countries in the European Union other than France) expressed their interest in taking part in this event by answering a call for project proposals issued by the ministry. A scientific committee selected the final 80 proposals (including 20 from

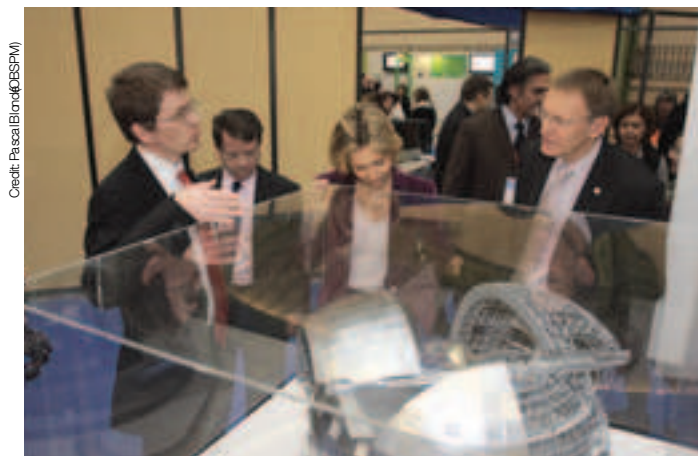


Figure 1. Henri Boffin from ESO (left) explaining the model of the dome for the European Extremely Large Telescope to Valérie Pécresse, the French Minister of Higher Education and Research (centre) and Janez Potočnik, the European Commissioner for Science and Research (right).

other countries in the European Union) that were presented.

ESO was present, in a joint venture with several French research partners: CEA Service d'Astrophysique; Observatoire de Paris; Institut d'Astrophysique de Paris; Laboratoire d'Astrophysique de Marseille and the Centre de Recherche Astrophysique de Lyon.

The stand occupied by ESO and its partners was a 130 m² 'astronomy dome', entitled "From the VLT to the E-ELT: Europe, a Window on the Universe". It showcased most current astronomical themes, from life in the Universe to black holes and dark energy, as well as the crucial role played by Europe in these areas, with particular emphasis on ESO's Very Large Telescope (VLT) and its plan

to build the biggest 'eye' on Earth, the 42-metre European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT).

Numerous short presentations on a wide variety of topics made by astronomers from our partner institutes were an important component of the stand. These presentations drew a very large crowd throughout the three days. ESO's presence at the European City was very much appreciated both by the public and the media, and the E-ELT was showcased in the special Euronews report on the event. Moreover, we had the pleasure of welcoming the French Minister of Higher Education and Research, Valérie Pécresse, together with the European Commissioner for Science and Research, Janez Potočnik. If there is a building that can compete with the magnificent Grand Palais, it is the planned E-ELT!

ESO and the International Year of Astronomy 2009

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As many readers already know, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) launched 2009 as the International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009) under the theme "The Universe, Yours to Discover". IYA2009 marks the 400th anniversary of the first astronomical observations through a telescope, by Galileo Galilei. After many

years of preparation, we are ready for an amazing year full of discovery and wonder. ESO has played a major role in this project since planning began in 2003.

ESO is hosting the IAU's IYA 2009 Secretariat, which coordinates the Year globally. ESO is also one of the Organisational Associates of IYA2009, and was closely involved in the resolution submitted to the United Nations by Italy, which led to the UN's 62nd General Assembly proclaiming 2009 the International Year of Astronomy.

[ESO IYA2009 projects and activities](#)

There will be a range of ESO-specific activities throughout the year, some of which are described here.

"In search of our Cosmic Origins" is a planetarium show about ALMA. The show is being produced by ESO and the Association of French Language Planetariums in collaboration with the Planetarium of Augsburg.