



## ITALY, Member of ESO

On May 24, 1982, the Italian Ambassador in Paris deposited the instrument of accession with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, as foreseen by Art. 13 of the ESO Convention. With this act Italy has become a member of ESO.

Perhaps it is of some interest to summarize the main historical steps which in the end led to this very positive conclusion. Apparently the main reason why Italy did not participate in the foundation of ESO is because Italian astronomers in the early '60s were essentially divided between the desire to participate in the founding of ESO and the equally strong desire to have a national telescope. It was of course believed, and perhaps rightly so, that the Italian Government was not willing to finance both enterprises. Eventually, priority was given to the national telescope project. This turned out to be a historical mistake. Ironically enough, it is the participation in ESO which will probably permit funding of the Italian national telescope (3.5 m) in the northern hemisphere. However, subsequently many Italian astronomers maintained a strong interest in ESO but no real step forward was taken until late 1977 when for the first time an Italian representative named by the Italian Research Council (CNR) was allowed to participate in the ESO Council meetings as an observer. This was a very important decision which finally led to a meeting between an Italian delegation headed by the Minister of Research and Technology, Mr. V. Scalia, and an ESO delegation headed by the President of Council, Prof. F. Denisse. The meeting took place in January 1980 in the town of Taormina (Sicily), the beautiful and inspiring surroundings of which assisted in the

signing of the basic agreement for the participation of Italy. The detailed agreement was ready by May 1980, and on December 19 of the same year the Italian Government approved and sent to Parliament the law establishing the participation of Italy to ESO. The formal approval of the Italian Parliament was obtained on March 2, 1982 and the law published in the "Supplemento ordinario alla Gazzetta Ufficiale No. 92" (Legge 10 Marzo 1982, n. 127).

The hope and wish is that the new membership of Italy will not only satisfy the legitimate wishes of the Italian astronomers and astrophysicists who will now have access to the optical observations in the southern hemisphere, but will also contribute to strengthening the Organization and to further increase its basic role in the development of European astronomy.

*Per aspera ad astra!*

G.S.

With Italy and Switzerland as new members of ESO, the annual contribution level has been increased from 32.5 to 40 million DM and the shares of the contributions of the various countries have changed as follows:

	Before	Shares in %	Now
Belgium	8.81		6.28
Denmark	4.71		3.35
France	33.33		26.75
Fed. Rep. of Germany	33.33		26.75
Italy	—		17.16
Netherlands	11.68		8.33
Sweden	8.14		5.81
Switzerland	—		5.57
	100.00		100.00

## The ESO Observing Programmes Committee

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Since 1978 the ESO Observing Programmes Committee (OPC) has "the function to inspect and rank the proposals made for observing programmes at La Silla, and thereby to advise the Director General on the distribution of observing

time". The members (one from each member country) and their alternates are nominated by the respective national committees for five-year terms (not immediately renewable). The terms are staggered so that each year one or two persons are