

ing ambiguities contained in some official statements according to which the formal recognition of ESO's status on Paranal would depend on the conclusion of the above-mentioned Agreement. At the May 1994 meetings in Santiago, understanding had been reached that this Agreement will merely confirm the already existing legal situation. The main objective is to expand the cooperation between Chile and ESO by granting ensured access for Chilean astronomers to ESO's facilities and incorporate elements of Chilean labour legislation into the ESO internal staff regulations.

In view of these circumstances, and pending the successful conclusion of these negotiations, Council therefore instructed the ESO Management to continue exploring alternative sites for the VLT.

In a final statement, the ESO Council again expressed its hope that the scientific co-operation between Europe and Chile in the field of astronomy which began in 1963 will continue to develop and expand well into the next century to the mutual benefit of science in both communities.

The Continuation of the VLT Project at Paranal

In practical terms, the above decision by Council implies that ESO is now taking the steps necessary to move from Europe to Paranal the main mechanical parts of the rotating dome (total weight around 500 tons) for the first VLT 8.2-metre unit telescope. The transport will begin in late September and it is ex-

pected that the ship will unload its precious cargo in Antofagasta sometime in November. The assembly at Paranal will begin soon thereafter, once the concrete base, now under construction, is ready. This will enable the VLT project to stay within the planned timeline for completion just after the year 2000.

A Visit to Chile

In order to assess the current situation in Chile, I paid a visit to this country in the period August 23–26, 1994, together with the Head of the VLT project, Prof. M. Tarengi. On August 24 we visited the Paranal site together with the Antofagasta authorities, including members of the Regional Government and also the Members of the Chilean Parliament from the Second Region, Senator A. Alessandri, Messrs. R. Gajardo and F. Valenzuela. The Mayor of Taltal also joined the visitors on the mountain top.

Both the site and the foundation layout were very impressive, and for the first time it was possible to get a feeling of the full magnitude of this enormous project. There were many positive comments by the visitors and this was an excellent opportunity for ESO to show its VLT project and future ambitions to the local authorities.

Later that day, the ESO Management made a thorough presentation of the VLT project in the presence of more than 150 persons at Hotel Antofagasta in that city. Among those present were the Members of the Parliament, various authorities from the Antofagasta and Taltal municipalities and also many local business-

men. This event confirmed the positive mood and the profound support which ESO enjoys in the Second Region. This was also obvious during a visit which Daniel Hofstadt and I paid to the Intendente (Governor) the next day.

Travelling on to Santiago the next day, our delegation met with the Ambassadors of the ESO member states and we gave a report on the latest developments at the ESO Council, as well as the status of the relations with the Chilean authorities. The same day we attended a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Santiago during which preparations were made for the final negotiations of the Supplementary Agreement.

Later that day we met with Mr. J.M. Insulza, Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, for a further exchange of views on all related matters. We were pleased to feel again the very positive attitude of the Under-Secretary personally and also the sincere desire of the Chilean Government to see the VLT installed in Chile. Mr. Insulza is going to visit Europe later this year, and we took the opportunity to extend a warm invitation to him to visit the ESO Headquarters in Garching during his stay in Germany.

Finally, as many of the administrative and scientific activities have now been transferred from La Silla to Santiago, we decided to inaugurate the Vitacura offices on this occasion. The brief ceremony was attended by many Chilean astronomers and related scientific authorities. I took this opportunity to express again the importance of clear support for ESO's case from the scientific community in Chile.

TELESCOPES AND INSTRUMENTATION

VLT Progress Report

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The following series of pictures best illustrates the enormous progress made in the VLT Project which is now in a new and dynamic phase of construction. The recent decision by the Council to continue with the erection is the natural consequence of the major progress made in the construction of the first unit telescope in Europe. The first 8.2-m mirror is currently undergoing the polishing process at REOSC, and the first interferogram was taken successfully. Blank no. 2 is now ready and Schott will deliver it to REOSC in October. Blank no. 3 has successfully completed the ceramization phase. In Milan, the foundations for the pre-erection in Europe are ready to receive the azimuth track, 16 m in diameter, which was machined at Ansaldo in Genova.

Figure 1 shows the azimuth track on the turning table supported by the special tool (the blue part) which was de-

signed and manufactured for the VLT Project.

Elements of the fork structure have

been welded and machined as shown in Figure 2. In addition, many of the sub-systems of the tube are in the advanced



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

phase of manufacture, as can be seen in Figures 3 and 4.

In the course of the first half of 1995, with the full integration of the telescope in Milan, we will be able to see the VLT resembling Figure 5 which shows a graphic presentation of the unit telescope prepared by J. Quebatte.

While telescope no. 1 is ready to be assembled in Milan, enclosure no. 1 is ready to be assembled in Chile. The civil engineering activities on Paranal are proceeding as planned and will be reported in greater detail in an article in the next *Messenger*. It is expected to start the erection of the first enclosure in December 1994.

The first elements of the enclosure, the mini-seismic supports embedded in the foundations, are already in Chile (Figure 6 on page 4). In a few weeks they will be placed at their final location.

All structural elements of enclosure no. 1 have been machined, and for a few critical sub-assemblies there will be a pre-erection in Europe to test performances and interfaces. Figure 7 (page 4) shows the upper ring of the fixed structure on which the boogies will be



Figure 5.

mounted, a part of the enclosure platform that will give access to the Nasmyth platform.

In the last week of September, the first shipment of more than 100 tons of steel will leave Europe for the journey to Chile.

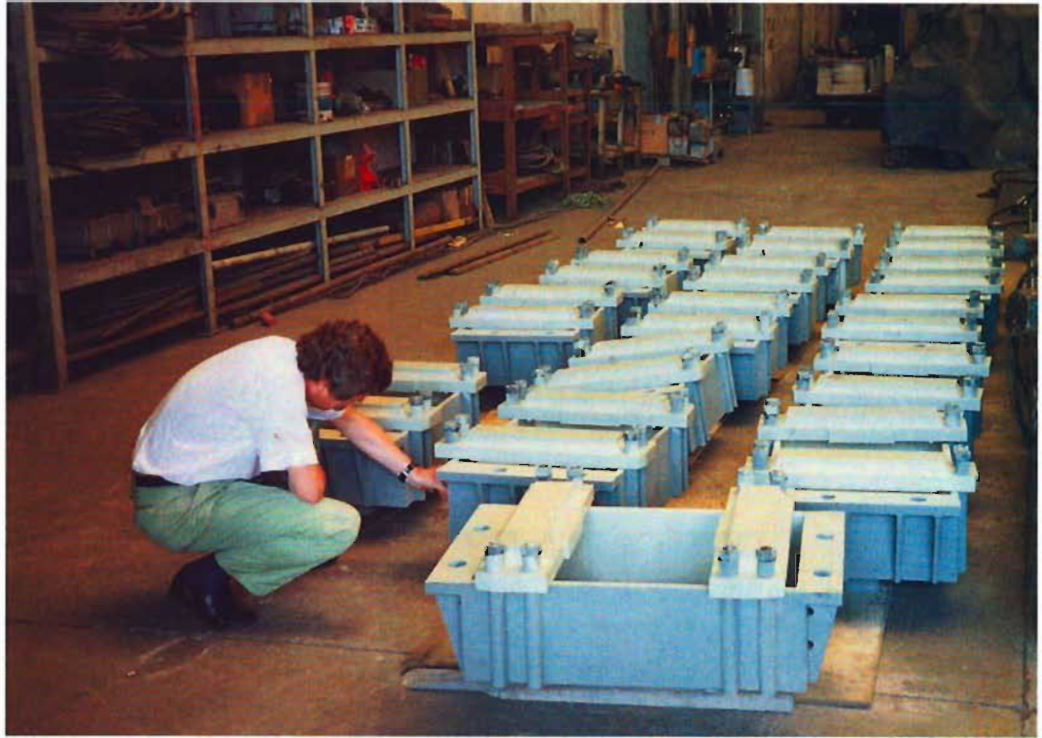


Figure 6.

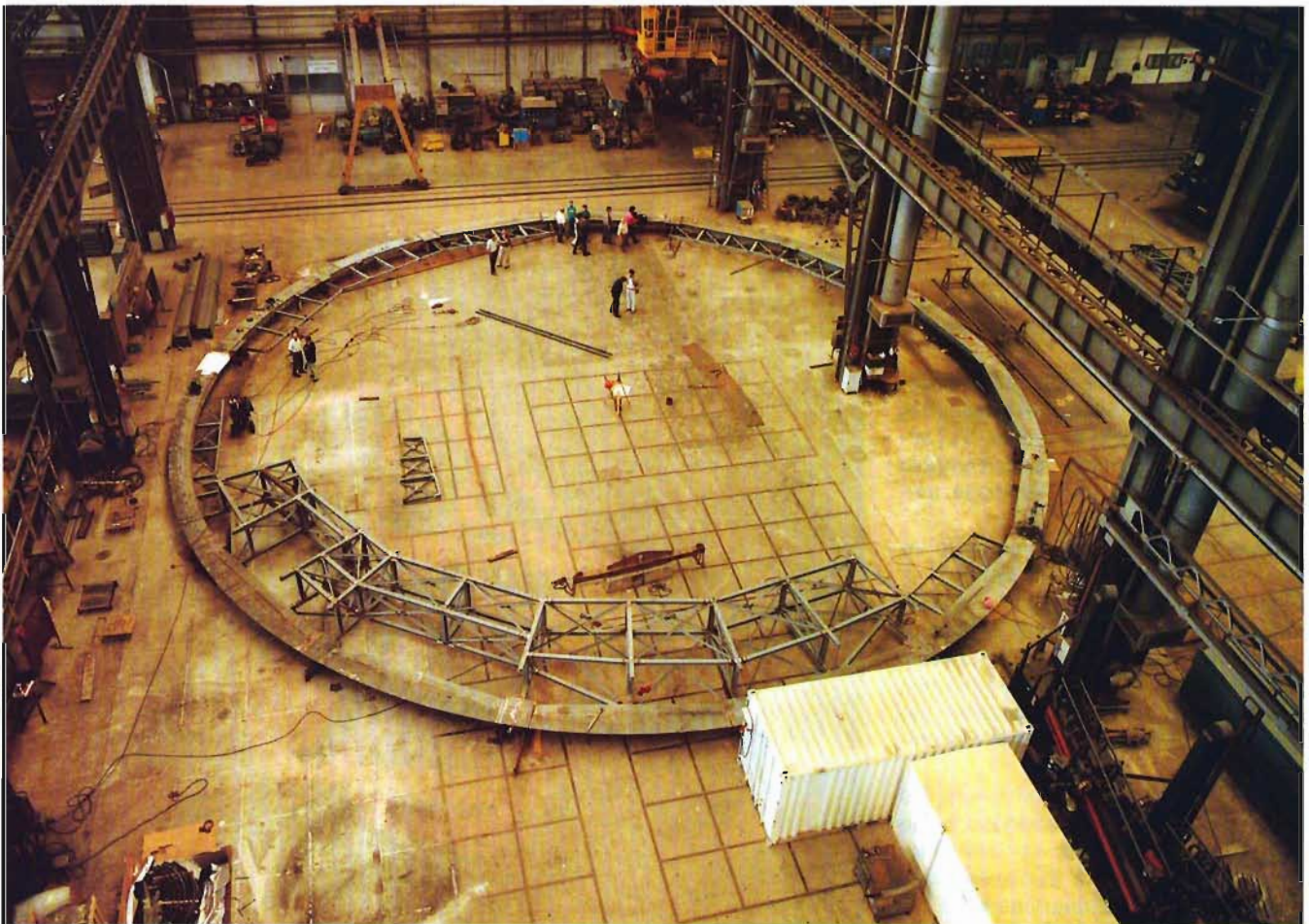


Figure 7.