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Chilean Senate Ratifies Agreement with ESO

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On 5 September 1996, the Senate of the Republic of Chile (Second Chamber of the Parliament) approved the Interpretative, Supplementary and Modifying Agreement to the Convention of 1963, which regulates the relations between the European Southern Observatory and its host country, the Republic of Chile.

Following formal approval by the ESO Council, it is expected that instruments of ratification could be exchanged before the end of this year.

The completion of this process is a reason for great mutual satisfaction as the new Agreement consolidates the already existing good relationship between ESO and the Government of Chile, and heralds a new era of cooperation with benefits for both parties.

The ratification of this Agreement is of particular value for ESO, now engaged at Cerro Paranal in the construction of the largest telescope of the world, because it signifies a pillar of stability for the future activities of this Organisation in Chile and thus for the development and operation of the VLT observatory into the next century. The European astronomical community now has full security that it can continue to pursue its front-line scientific investigations in Chile.

At the same time the Chilean astronomers will have privileged access

within up to 10 per cent of observing time on all present and future ESO telescopes in Chile. They also will have membership on all ESO scientific and technical committees. Chilean and European scientific communities will henceforth share the important scientific discoveries which will be made with the VLT facility at Cerro Paranal.

By this Agreement the ESO regulations for local Chilean staff will be modified to incorporate the principles of Chilean legislation regarding collective bargaining and freedom of association. This new regulation will be drafted in consultation with a representative of the Chilean Government as well as local staff representatives.

Concerning ESO's juridical immunity on all of the territory of Chile, the Government of Chile has indicated to ESO that these immunities are clearly stipulated in the 1963 Convention and that it is applicable to all properties and possessions of the Organisation, wherever they are located in Chile. Those properties, according to the Convention, should only be used by the Organisation in Chile for scientific and official purposes. The Acuerdo reconfirms these immunities and their validity for both, Paranal and La Silla Observatories. The issue of ownership of the Paranal site had been settled earlier in the year by the Chilean

government in direct negotiation with the private claimants.

As part of this Agreement ESO will continue and increase its contributions to the development of Chilean astronomy and the educational and cultural development of local communities. ESO is indebted to the Government of Chile and especially to the Minister of Foreign Relations, Don José Miguel Insulza, and all those who have worked towards this Agreement and its ratification by the Chilean Parliament.

I wish also to recognise the contribution of all those at ESO who played a role in bringing this about. The ESO negotiating committee included both previous and present Presidents of the ESO Council, Professor Franco Pacini and Dr. Peter Creola, as well as many members of the Council. We are particularly indebted to Mr. Daniel Hofstadt who has played a continued and significant role in the improvement of the Chile-ESO relations.

Together with all our partners in Europe and Chile, ESO can continue enthusiastically in this new and exciting scientific adventure of building the Very Large Telescope. All humanity without regard of national boundaries, will benefit from the wealth of new knowledge in the origin and evolution of the physical universe in which we live, which this powerful new observatory will bring about.