

Recommendation regarding the European Southern Observatory (ESO)

International research-related organisations form important nodes in the European research network. They are drivers of the national and European science scene, can trigger catching-up processes in national and European industries and economies, and make an important contribution to the further development of the European Research Area. Membership of these organisations is therefore all the more important for small countries such as Austria, as they are not able to achieve the necessary critical masses alone or provide the necessary infrastructures.

In order to be able to carry out world-class research in the field of observation-supported astronomy and astrophysics in Austria in the future and, given the other positive effects of accession to ESO referred to above, it is necessary to take a number of steps.

The Austrian Council therefore recommends:

- starting negotiations with ESO about Austrian membership at the earliest possible date
- however, in the view of the Austrian Council a substantial reduction in the joining fee, (currently EUR 16.4 million), is an important precondition for membership. A substantial share of the joining fee should definitely be made in the form of non-cash and/or personnel contributions.
- The question of the joining fee should also be clarified in advance at the civil servant level, whereby the arrangements for the planned accession of the Irish Republic should be used as a guide.
- A decision in favour of Austrian ESO membership should be contingent upon the development of a structural concept for astronomy and astrophysics in Austria, in order to ensure that the best possible use is made of the international infrastructure. In accordance with its recommendation of April 2003 (establishment of

key research areas at Austrian universities) the Austrian Council proposes that the Science Council examine the current distribution of astronomy and astrophysics at three locations with regard to whether the status quo is suitable for optimally exploiting the opportunities presented by ESO membership.

- A monitoring process should be set up at the outset with the goal of evaluating membership after five years; the regular collection of data increases the opportunities for taking timely research policy steering measures. Other participation models, such as a co-operative membership with countries such as Hungary and the Czech Republic (as in the Institut Max von Laue-Paul Langevin ILL) or participation as a scientific partner (as in the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility ESRF) should be included in the negotiating scenarios.