

NORDIC OPTICAL TELESCOPE

Office of the Director



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Your Excellency,

As Chairman of the ASTRONET Board, I am writing to inform you of a new strategic initiative to coordinate and strengthen the development of all of European astronomy, and to invite Bulgaria to join this unprecedented effort.

ASTRONET is a high-level initiative to develop a comprehensive long-term strategic plan for the future of European astronomy, at all wavelengths or types of particles, from the ground and from space. The plan will consider the entire “scientific food chain” from large infrastructures to theory, computing, and human resources and involve the *entire* astronomical community in Europe. Recognising that EU funding in FP7 will provide only a tiny fraction of the necessary investments, the funding agencies that will, in the end, pay most of the cost of any new astronomical infrastructure projects have set up ASTRONET as an opportunity for European astronomy to present a united strategic plan for the next 15-25 years. Formally organised as an ERA-NET, ASTRONET is supported by a 2.5-M€ grant from the EC under FP6 for the period 2005-2009. Up-to-date information on our activities is maintained at the web site <http://www.astronet-eu.org>.

The first step in this process was the definition of a long-term European *Science Vision*, which was published on September 28, 2007. The next crucial step is the development of an *Infrastructure Roadmap*, which will lay out a realistic plan for building up the European infrastructures needed to address the questions defined in the *Science Vision*. This task is proceeding rapidly: A first draft of the report will be made public in early May and will be debated thoroughly at a large symposium in Liverpool, UK, on June 16-19. The final report is scheduled for completion in October.

A key objective of ASTRONET is to involve the entire astronomical community in Europe in this effort. ASTRONET includes partners in the categories of Contractor, Associate, or Forum Member (see the enclosed *Quick Reference Document* for details). Contractors are the Ministries of Education and Research of Germany and Spain, national research funding agencies of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United Kingdom, and ESO and NOTSA (for the Nordic countries). Initial Associates were ESA and the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft (Germany); since then, national research agencies in Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia, Sweden, and Switzerland have joined as Associates, and several more countries (e.g. Romania, Ukraine) plan to become Associates soon. Only a small handful of countries with any activity in astronomy have not yet joined.

As Chairman of the ASTRONET Board and responsible for the task of including all interested European communities, I am pleased to extend a cordial invitation to our Bulgarian colleagues to join this exciting enterprise.

Given the size and international involvement of Bulgarian astronomy, we propose that Bulgaria join as an Associate through an appropriate national organization (see the *Quick Reference Document* for details). The requirements for a national funding agency to become an Associate in ASTRONET are simple: An authorised representative of the agency informs us of its intention to contribute to the goals of ASTRONET and its willingness to sign the attached *Associate Agreement*, which defines the status, rights, and obligations of each party and identifies the contact persons on both sides. Upon signature of the Agreement and approval by the ASTRONET Board (normally a quick, routine matter), the association takes effect immediately. For the record I note that, as an ERANET, ASTRONET has no funding to support actual research or development process; its role is to promote the coordination that will help to deploy existing funds more cost-effectively.

As noted above, nearly all astronomically significant European countries have joined ASTRONET as we move into the critical Roadmap phase of the project. Notably, if Bulgaria could join before the Roadmap Symposium in June, you would be invited to attend this important event and help us to shape the future of European astronomy. I look forward to hear from you on the possibilities for such an association and remain at your disposal for any further information.

Sincerely yours,



Johannes Andersen
Chair, ASTRONET Board