

European Astronomical Society

7th Business Meeting
Rolle (Switzerland), 5–6 February 2015

Minutes

Attendance from representatives of affiliated societies:

Angello Antonelli (SAIt, Italy) - AA
Martin Barstow (RAS, UK) - MB
Javier Gorgas (SEA, Spain) - JG
Gerhard Hensler (ÖGAA, Austria) - GH
Maris Krastins (LAS, Latvia) - MK
Georges Meynet (SSAA, Switzerland) - GM (only 6 Feb.)
Areg Mickaelian (ArAS, Armenia) - AM
Céline Reylé (SF2A, France) - CR
Olga Sil'chenko (EAAS, Russia) - OS
David Southwood (RAS, UK) - DS (only 6 Feb.)
Roland Stark (ASTRONET) - RS
Loukas Vlahos (Hel.A.S., Greece) - LV
Joachim Wambsganss (AG, Germany) - JW
Jan Vondrak (CAS, Czech Republic) - JV

Attendance from representatives of EAS Council and Office:

Thierry Courvoisier (President) - TC
Serena Viti (Secretary) - SV
Johan Knapen (Treasurer) - JK
Emmanouil Angelakis (Vice-president) - EA
Roger Davies (Vice-President) - RD
Coralie Neiner (Councillor) - CN
Francesco Palla (Councillor) - FP
Olga Sil'chenko (Councillor) - OS
Eline Tolstoy (Councillor) - ET
Vassilis Charmandaris (EAS Newsletter Editor) - VC
Martine Logossou (EAS financial & administrative officer) - ML
Marc Türler (EAS webmaster and Prizes officer) - MT
[Apologies received from Michael Bode (Councillor)]

February 5 (14:30 – 17:30)

1. Welcome by the president

TC welcomes everybody mentioning the fruitful exercise of the last years.

The President asked the outgoing and incoming Secretary of EAS to engage with the Affiliated Societies to give as wide publicity as possible to the MERAC Prizes.

2. Approval of the minutes of the 6th Business Meeting

The minutes as informal notes have been sent out by SV on 2 February 2015. As there are no comments, the minutes are approved.

3. Actions, resolved and pending

SV goes through the list of actions. There is only one pending action; the others are resolved.

4. Information from the Council meeting

TC reports about discussions at the Council meeting held the day before and this morning. A list of annual EAS tasks has been prepared as input to an agreement with the University of Geneva, which shall become the official host of the EAS Office.

On financial matters, the 2014 exercise ended with a benefit. The budget of 2016 has been discussed and both the accounts (for approval) and the budget will be presented at the General Assembly during EWASS 2015.

The future of the EAS Newsletter has been discussed. TC is thankful to VC, who is stepping down at the end of 2015 as Editor after 11 years of activity. The idea is to evolve with a new Editor to an electronic Newsletter instead of the printed one. AM stresses the need to keep real articles and not just the short e-News information items. This is indeed the idea.

Concerning organisational members, TC, once more, encourages everybody to help find new EAS organisational members by approaching people, companies, and universities in the respective countries.

TC mentions that the EAS has a Facebook page, which is quite successful. He also mentions that the EAS Prizes have been awarded and will be announced in the coming weeks. The EAS statement on Open Access Publications will be distributed more widely to European academies,

etc. The EAS started an Ethics Working Group to be coordinated by ET and Pierre Lena, who presented a draft document to Council. As this triggered some interest for contributions, ET proposes to collect ideas via e-mail and TC reminds the attendees about the usual process of consultation of the EAS members before finalising the document.

TC concludes this agenda item saying that Council will continue to be attentive in keeping activities and contacts with the Eastern part of Europe. Other discussed topics such as EWASS and Brussels, will be covered later in the meeting.

5. Actions with and in Eastern societies

TC gives the word to OS representing the Eurasian Astronomical Society (EAAS) founded in 1990 as the Soviet Astronomical Society. OS presents slides on the activities in the eastern societies.

One of the main activities of the EAAS is networking between astronomers via conferences, interdisciplinary scientific seminars (6 very popular ones in 2014). She mentions also the scientific journal "Astronomical and Astrophysical Transactions (AApTr)" published in English by Cambridge Scientific Publishers. There are problems with education in astronomy, which is not taught in the general courses. She mentions finally the new Moscow Planetarium, which has been entirely renovated.

A short discussion follows on the recognition of western master degrees for PhD students in Moscow and, on the other hand, on the education level of Russian students, which apply for PhD positions in western Europe.

TC wonders how to better liaise with the eastern partners. AM sees this as a concern for all of the eastern part and suggests to have more links via diverse articles in different newsletters and to have maybe links from the EAS site to other in particular eastern newsletters. Anyway increasing the contact to other societies is always good.

6. Astronomers out of academia, jobs and opportunities

EA presents this agenda item. He mentions the wish to get information from job seekers outside of academia. One idea is to set up a job portal with tools and links provided. It should include the information job providers want to have. Affiliated Societies can provide useful information on companies, astronomers who found a job outside academia, etc. LV wonders if the companies are aware of what astronomers can provide. He thinks that if we tell graduate students that astronomy can also lead to something else, they will not stop their study due to the lack of future possibilities.

A discussion followed on the issue. The main problem to solve is to help Postdocs who are not getting a permanent job in astronomy. The fact that astronomers going to industry are perceived

as a failure in their career is not good. One idea is to extend the EAS job portal with the possibility to post CVs by job seekers to be consulted by job providers. A database of potential job givers (space industry, companies needing data analysts, etc.) should be developed. Training sessions at EWASS were also proposed to be competitive on the job market. The idea of providing a list of possible jobs from statistics of astronomers having left academia is also proposed, as this information is available in several countries. GH mentions that in Austria the universities start the connection between students and companies of interest and this works well.

As there is some time left until the coffee break, TC proposes to use this to discuss again the issue of finding new Organisational Members to increase the income of the society for its running and future development, in particular with the EAS presence in Brussels. CN stresses the importance of personal contacts with potential Organisational Members. She has documents and list of companies per country, which she can provide to help contacting them. A discussion followed about the difficulty to convince a company to become an Organisational Member and about the benefits we can provide them. Exhibition space at EWASS is of interest, but this has also an associated cost. Ideas of other benefits are most welcome. They should maybe be better advertised, possibly in an upcoming e-News. CN is ready to continue to contact potential Organisational Members in different countries, although this was not so successful until now. The question on the difficulty to get more individual EAS members is also re-discussed.

ACTION 1 on SV/MT: to add the benefits for Organisational Members in a coming e-News

7. ASTRONET evolution

RS presents slides on the motivation and aims of ASTRONET. He reminds that ASTRONET is a consortium of funding agencies for strategic planning and coordination. It is modelled on the US Decadal Survey. The key achievements are the completion and recent updates of the ASTRONET documents "Science Vision" (2007, rev. 2013) and "Infrastructure Roadmap" (2008, rev. 2014). These documents are prepared by astronomers, for astronomers. They are in line with the roadmap of ESFRI (2011) and of ASPERA, but may differ in ranking. He then also mentions the ASTRONET collaboration, among others, with CoSADIE, a Virtual Observatory project funded by EU in 2012-2014. The challenges ahead are to find a common strategy, to reinforce the coordination in the ESA Cosmic Vision, to search for trans-disciplinary approaches, and to solve Big Data challenges. The funding of ASTRONET ended in June 2014, but there is the will to continue with reduced funding. The current updates concern projects up to 2025, so maybe in 2020 there will be the need for a further update.

A discussion followed the presentation. FP asks about recommendations and priorities concerning laboratory astrophysics. RS mentions a document listing quite a lot of scattered activities in this field and the need of coordination. Many participants report on the way they use the Vision and Roadmap documents for their national strategy. In most countries, the national strategy is in good agreement with the ASTRONET priorities. Asked by TC, RS says that main

aim of the ASTRONET session at EWASS 2015 is to increase the awareness of ASTRONET, to present the latest developments, and the future structure of ASTRONET. TC suggests to reserve time for a discussion with the community. He also suggests a different topic every year for brainstorming discussions.

8. Next EWASS meetings

ET presents the status of EWASS meetings. She states that the EAS obtained a small profit from the EWASS 2014 in Geneva, and that this was the first time the EWASS has been organised by EAS with the support of a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO), namely Kuoni Congress. The preparation for EWASS 2015 in Tenerife is going very well with a rich programme including 11 Symposia, 27 Special Sessions and 8 Special Meetings. In 2016, it is foreseen to held EWASS in Athens and then go to Prague for EWASS 2017.

VC informs the EWASS 2016 will be held in the week of 4 to 8 July. They will have a local destination management company, which is CONVIN. The main venue is foreseen to be the Eugenides Foundation. TC suggests to have somebody from Prague (e.g. Jan Palous) in Athens' SOC to establish links and ensure continuity from year-to-year.

JV states that the Czech Astronomical Society (CAS) is ready to host EWASS 2017. Kuoni Congress has an office in Prague and Jan Palous has been identified to chair the Local Organising Committee. Concerning the venue there are two possibilities, the Clarion Congress Hotel and the Prague Congress Centre, which hosted the IAU General Assembly in 2006. The former would have 1 auditorium of 770 seats, 2 rooms of ~300 seats and 4 rooms of ~100 seats, plus smaller rooms, while the biggest room in the latter has 1800 seats. As the Congress Centre is found to be too big and too expensive, JK asks whether there are universities that could be used as venue. JV sees no suitable facility given the large number of rooms needed.

Concerning EWASS 2018, GH mentions the IAU General Assembly to take place in Vienna during the second half of August. TC asks whether we should join EWASS to this event or do it in parallel. GH sees an association to the IAU difficult given the strict IAU guidelines to be followed. AM reminds that in Prague at the IAU of 2006, EAS did not make a full JENAM, but only held the administrative parts. An alternative is to move the date of the EWASS 2018 earlier in the year. The issue is kept open.

MB asks for an announcement of EWASS 2015 in the news of the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS).

ACTION 2 on SV: to send e-News info on EWASS 2015 to RAS for advertising

February 6 (9:00 - 12:00)

9. Astronomy strategy in Brussels

TC presents the progress made on the presence of European astronomy in Brussels since the last meeting in Rolle 2014. There have been discussions at EWASS 2014, a meeting on 4 November and the preparation

of the draft document provided to affiliated societies for this meeting. TC proposes to discuss this in 3 steps: first the paper of the initiative, then the funding issue and finally the implementation.

a) Paper

TC notes some slight differences resulting from the discussion at the Council meeting of yesterday. The Council proposes that the national societies nominate one representative to be the link between the strategy group and the affiliated societies. This person shall be a senior scientist. MB notes that this is an important initiative and thus that the RAS is ready to significantly contribute to this effort. Asked by RS, DS clarifies that the EU has three entities: Council, Parliament and Commission and that one has to be present in all of them. He explains that most decisions are taken by Council with inputs from the Commission. The latter is remarkably powerful as it prepares the things to be endorsed by the Council, which can only veto. One needs to understand how all these entities work together. It is not like any national administration. The closest system is maybe France. All the preparation is being done in Brussels and therefore it is important to have a link close or at Brussels.

RS wonders what is currently missing in Brussels from the astronomical point of view. He reminds that there are already long-term connections via RadioNet, ASTRONET, Opticon, etc. that have led to EU funding of SKA and CTA. DS answers that EAS is not trying to get funding from the EU, but the EAS can advise the EU to make the correct choices when funding astronomy. The idea is to represent the whole astronomical community. GH notes however that astronomical societies are not part of political decisions in most countries. The EAS initiative shall not weaken the position of the national societies and he wonders if it is not better to leave this to big organisations like ASTRONET and others. TC remarks that the EAS is very aware of this issue and this is why we wish to have these national points of contact. We just want to add an European layer to the national initiatives.

JW reports about discussions at the "Astronomische Gesellschaft" (AG) on the topic, which did not yet led to a consensus. There is a bit of reluctance about the financial contribution, especially as the AG includes also amateur astronomers. There is also the question on what the person in Brussels shall really do concretely. LV notes the difficulties for funding smaller projects than the

largest European facilities. Making science with these big infrastructures and huge collaborations is not so easy.

DS mentions that the European Physical Society (EPS) has just opened an office in Brussels. EAS can use this as a productive link. TC adds that we are in a learning process and that we do not know yet the exact tasks to do, we shall see how things evolve. After a diversion of the discussion towards ERC grants and the difficulty to provide permanent positions afterwards at the national level, TC concludes the discussion and thanks everybody for agreeing with the principles in the paper.

b) Funding

Concerning the funding, it is mentioned that the RAS would be ready to carry the exercise alone. But TC notes that this is not needed, since EAS can contribute and the AG would also contribute if they are not alone with the RAS. DS clarifies that we are not engaging in something on perpetuity. It is a commitment for 3 years and we can then see whether it is worth or not. Asked by JW how one can measure the success, DS sees an obvious test in the fact that one gets or not a communication link and a response. TC suggests that the academies of sciences could held at national level in the funding. He concludes by addressing an immense thank to the RAS for being ready to concretise this, and thus to allow this initiative to go on.

c) Implementation

DS presents Veronika Raszler as the possible person to act in Brussels. She was a student of Prof. Steve Miller (UCL) and is now living in Leuven near Brussels. She speaks a lot of languages, works for EuroPlanet and had outreach and IT activities. TC has yet to meet her. One could then envisage a 20% position starting after the summer. The contract should either go through RAS or EAS and the contractor shall then deal with the taxes, VAT and other issues. TC thanks for this proposal and the contacts taken. He asks for agreement with the proposed practicalities. GH would like to be able to meet her possibly at the EWASS conference. TC agrees and mentions the business lunch as an opportunity. DS adds that ESA and ESO have been informed about this initiative, but they should not fund it as it shall remain independent.

As there is obviously a general agreement, TC turns to the next step, which is to define the strategy group. FP mentions that this has been discussed by the Council, which finds it important that the EAS President is part of the steering committee and possibly as the Chair. TC would be ready to serve until the end of his term. CN adds that DS and Andreas Burkert shall also be in the group as they started this initiative. DS would be very happy to facilitate as much as possible, but he tells he could also be an observer. MB suggests to be included as well to represent the RAS. JW notes that the AG is in the same situation with Burkert being no more in the AG Council. JG proposes Jose Miguel Espinosa for Spain, who is very much involved in international projects.

SV then suggests people to send her suggestions with some motivation and TC thanks everybody for fruitful discussions.

10. Communications of societies

TC invites SV to lead this part of the discussion. SV proposes to go around the table, first with the ones not presenting slides.

AA presents the Italian Astronomical Society (SAIt), which is supported by some ministries, as well as by INAF and ASI. He mentions the different prizes attributed this year by the IAS. Astronomy Olympiads are organised and involve more than hundred schools. 40 finalists were selected and 5 winners participated to the international competition with silver and bronze medals. The annual meeting of 2015 will be held in Catania, Sicily. The IAS will also organise two schools for middle and high school teachers and a new edition of the Olympiad, besides awarding prizes and give support to the International Year of Light.

JW presents the activities of the AG, which had its annual meeting in Bamberg. Prof. Matthias Steinmetz has been elected president and JW became vice-president (a position leading usually to future presidency). JW reports about the highest Prize, the Schwarzschild medal, attributed in 2014 to Margaret Geller. He stresses the need for national decadal reports and notes that the withdrawal of Germany out of the SKA collaboration was done without consultation of the AG, which was felt as a shock. Another bad news is the US decision that SOFIA will be put down. In general there is a decrease of funding in all areas (institutes, societies, etc.), which is a concern. He also mentions that PhD students are now to be paid at least at 50% of a Postdoc salary.

LV presents the Hellenic Astronomical Society (Hel.A.S.) as the new president replacing Nick Kylafis. Greece has an enormous capacity in astronomers with many interested students. Hel.A.S. organises bi-annual meetings. He notes the high number of good scientists and of students educated abroad in the last years, despite the other problems in Greece. But at the same time, there is a loss of very good more senior people. All in all, the situation is not so bad. There is no strategy with the quick change of the government, but anyway the link between the government and the society is rather weak. LV hopes that Greece will remain part of ESA. He summarizes that astronomy is doing well (high publication rate and visibility), while the country has difficulties.

JG reports for the Spanish Astronomical Society (SEA) that 350 astronomers attended the week of the general gathering, which had 20 invited speakers (mostly from abroad) and a high impact in the media. The number of SEA members is increasing over the years. Now almost 90% of the 850 professional astronomers are members of SEA. 2014 has also the highest number of PhD theses until now. The SEA has many activities such as conferences, courses, exhibitions. JG ends with EWASS 2015, which will have a high attendance from Spain, thanks to fellowships.

MK reports that the Latvian Astronomical Society (LAS) has 41 members, but a problem of aging members. The activities are the organisation of the Olympiads for schools and the star party mostly for amateur astronomers. The LAS also awards a Prize (Medal) and is discussing joining ESA.

GH reports on behalf of Prof. Manuel Güdel the President of the Austrian Astronomical Society (ÖGAA). Astronomy is a rather small community of ~200 members in Austria with 2/3 of them in Vienna. The society is involved in all decisions and led to the ESO membership of Austria in 2008. Vienna will host the IAU General Assembly of 2018. There is already a lot of activity on this going on. Physics is strong in Austria, but to get funding for astronomy is difficult.

CR reports that the French Astronomical Society (SF2A) has about 1400 members, all being professional astronomers. The new president is Hervé Wozniak from Strasbourg. Fees are the main income of the SF2A with additional support from CNES. The next annual meeting will be in Toulouse in June 2015, with the CFHT as a special topic. A French/Spanish collaboration prize is awarded since 2013. France has two astronomers contributing to the International Year of Light. The SF2A coordinates the masters in astrophysics for all French universities and keeps the contact with the PhD students in a central platform.

GM presents the Swiss Society of Astronomy (SSAA), which has about 250 members. Its main role is to help with the organisation of the Saas-Fee courses, which have a different theme every year. The 45th Course of 2015 will be on planet formation in proto-planetary disks. There are MERAC and Academy funds for young researchers. In September, there will be a joint meeting between the Swiss and Austrian Physical and Astronomical Societies in Vienna. GM notes finally that the Commission for Astronomy and the Commission of Space Research are the driving bodies for the strategic aspects.

MB reports that the RAS has ~3800 members including amateurs. The RAS has been restructured and has now four full time outreach officers, plus some part-time ones. Students pay now only a symbolic fee of 1 Pound instead of 28 and leads to more than 200 additional members per year. The RAS members still represent only about one half of all astronomers in UK. There are many positive things at the moment. The government finally realized the importance to fund astronomy, since the growth in economy is linked to scientific research. The government is now funding also space-based infrastructures. There are however difficulties to operate the new facilities and there is a reduction of Postdocs. There is the threat of UK leaving the EU. For the 200 years anniversary of the RAS in 2020, MB reports that they are looking for partnership going beyond UK.

AM presents slides on the Armenian Astronomical Society (ArAS). Armenia hosted in Oct. 2013 the IAU Symp. 304 on "Multiwavelength AGN surveys and studies". AM also mentions the meeting of 2014 on the relation of astronomy to other sciences, culture and society, which was a very good advertisement of astronomy. Armenia successfully participates to the Olympiads with

gold, silver and bronze medals. The organisation of science camps are a new initiative. The Byurakan Observatory tries to attract young scientists by offering a doubled salary to the most productive ones. The ArAS Newsletter has now 12 issues every year in the form of a PDF file with a lot of hyperlinks. It reports Armenian and international astronomy news events.

JV presents a few slides and reminds that the CAS was founded in 1917. EWASS 2017 will therefore mark its 100th anniversary. He presents the most important activities in 2014. There have been of the order of 10'000 participants in the astronomy Olympiads with some medals. The participation to the European Researcher's Night 2014 has attracted some 1000 people of all generations. JV lists the Prizes awarded by the CAS in 2014, including the Zeman prize for astrophotography. Cosmic Reviews is the media of the CAS for the members. The CAS web-portal is very active and receives about 3000 visits daily.

OS states that she already presented the EAAS in agenda item 5.

TC thanks everybody for the contributions and asks for any other item to be brought up.

JK wonders what is the main problem preventing to have more EAS members. JW thinks it is a lack of benefits. MB adds that RAS members receive the Astronomy and Geophysics magazine, which is more than a newsletter. The question of the inclusion of amateur astronomers is brought up by LV. TC says that this has been discussed already several times in the past. EAS has benefits, but the main driver according to him should be the will to build up the community and this message is difficult to pass to the younger people.

TC closes the session by proposing to set the next meeting tentatively to 3–4 February 2016. The EWASS business lunch will likely be on Tuesday as usual. SV will finalize the paper on the presence in Brussels and then send it to the affiliated societies.

Minutes written by Marc Türler
January 2016