

# Minutes of the ASTRONET Board meeting

Cork, 25 June 2025, 12:00-14:00

*In person: Antoine Merand (ESO), Thijs Geurts (SKAO), Hugues Sana (FWO), Mathilde Janssen (NWO, minutes), Saskia Matheussen (NWO), Martin Giard (CNRS, chair), Gaitee Hussain (ESA), Sven Wedemeyer (EAS), Jean-Paul Kneib (SCNAT), Salvatore Sciortino (INAF), Chris Woolford (STFC), Begona Garcia-Lorenzo (MICIU), Paul Callanan (ASI)*

*Online: Nanda Rea (MICIU), Tomasz Bulik (PTA), Garrelt Mellema (SRC).*

## Decisions

- The ASTRONET Board approves the minutes of the meeting of 13 March 2025
- Giard to be the SOC member for the next EAS meeting in Lausanne on behalf of the ASTRONET board

## Actions

1. Write a ASTRONET statement concerning the geopolitical situation. (*Matheussen and Woolford*)
2. Contribute a paragraph to the APPEC roadmap on joint interests (*WG1 and Giard*)
3. Plan the first/next meeting of their WG. (*WG 1-5*)
4. Propose a session for the next EAS meeting, the deadline is in 30 September (*WG4 and Matheussen*)
5. Send feedback on the draft MoU to Janssen. Janssen will group all the comments of the MoU and prepare a new version of the MoU. (*Members and Janssen*)
6. Investigate if it is possible to join as partner. (*Observers*)
7. Schedule the next board meeting at the end of October or beginning of November. (*Janssen*)

## 1. Opening of the meeting

## 2. Minutes of last meeting

No comments were made, and the minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

## 3. Round table (10 min)

### 4. Update

#### a. ESO (5 min)

Mérand shares an ESO update: The implementation of the ELT is the highest priority. Technical first light is planned for March 2029, and the start of scientific operations is planned for 2030. ESO is now looking to the future with "Expanding Horizons", a search for the next ground-based program. The Senior Science Committee that is overseeing the process, makes use of the ASTRONET roadmap. There is now a call for white papers. Furthermore, ESO is in contact with the Chilean government to raise awareness of the threats of the proposed green hydrogen project 'Inna' for the ESO observatories in Paranal.

#### b. ESA (5 min)

Hussain shares an ESA update on current and future missions. The recent call for Medium, Fast and mini-Fast mission opportunities in ESA's science programme resulted in just over 90 proposals, that are currently being assessed. In addition in November there will be the Council of Ministers which will determine the envelope of funding to ESA and to the Science Programme for the next 3 years. There is also an ongoing assessment of the potential impact implied by the NASA Budget situation to the missions and studies within the Science portfolio

#### c. SKAO (5 min)

Geurts shares an update on the SKAO, including the progress on construction of the radio telescope in South Africa and Australia. The first image of the SKA-Low in Australia was recorded on March 17th. Furthermore, Canada and India have joined as SKAO members, and SKAO is working with prospective new members, such as Ireland and Poland. In addition to science, the SKAO is working to collaborate sustainably with local and indigenous communities, as the telescopes are being built in remote areas.

## 5. Geopolitical situation

Board members shared updates on how the current geopolitical climate is affecting their organizations and collaborations. There is a shared sense of uncertainty and concern across the board as the broader atmosphere has become more polarized and challenging.

Particularly those with close ties to NASA or US-based collaborations, expressed significant concern about the implications of the proposed budget cuts for ongoing and future projects.

Some countries (e.g., France, Sweden, Spain, the Netherlands) have launched or are considering programs to attract US researchers, offering funding and support for relocation. However, these initiatives are sometimes met with resistance from local institutions, especially in the context of national budget cuts to education and research.

A recurring theme was the growing discussion around the dual use of research infrastructure for defense purposes. This is particularly relevant in light of increased defense budgets and the NATO 2%/5% spending targets, which many fear could come at the expense of research funding.

Giard suggests an ASTRONET motion, to express the worries but in a positive manner. It should focus on the freedom of science and the importance of a united Europe. Woolford and Matheussen will provide a first draft which will be shared with everyone after which we'll place it on the ASTRONET website and the members are asked to draw attention to it.

## 6. Working groups update

### a. WG1 Link with APPEC and elaboration of common strategies

Giard has attended the APPEC general assembly, APPEC is now working on their roadmap which should materialize within 1 to 2 years. The working group will contribute with a paragraph on joint interests, specifying what astronomy contributes to the field of astroparticle physics and vice versa. Furthermore the working group will be working on synergies, such as data related challenges and the role of AI.

### b. WG2 Future strategies for science with small telescopes: a concerted European exercise

Callanan reports that the working group has not started yet

### c. WG3 Building strategies to materialize the roadmap

This working group has not met yet is still searching for members. However, Giard had a first discussion with the IAC director, Valentín Martínez Pillet, on the EST that is in a crucial phase.

### d. WG4 Connection and joint policies with the EC and with key stakeholders

The action for this WG to arrange presence at the EAS has been completed. Matheussen gave a presentation in the session "*European astronomy: science vision beyond 2040*". Furthermore a meeting between the EAS council and the ASTRONET board took place at the EAS in Cork on 24 June to discuss how the two organisations can strengthen each other and to identify common topics to work on. ASTRONET and EAS agreed to meet twice a year. EAS proposed ASTRONET to come up with a proposal for a session for the next EAS. The deadline is in September, so this needs to be done on a short time. Additionally Matheussen attended the symposium 'Recovery Plan for Ukrainian Astronomy: Supporting Post-war Recovery in Ukraine through Astronomy' in Leiden on 10-11 June 2025, and contributed with a presentation on ASTRONET and the Science Vision and Roadmap endeavour.

### e. WG5 Sustainability and societal issues

This working group has not started yet, it was also still unclear who would join from ESO and SKAO. Mérand mentioned that at ESO it is best to contact Claudio Melo. Sana has comprised a list of topics for this workgroup. Important to identify new members for this working group, the new sustainability officer of SKAO, Matheussen will join as a temporary member and will look for a suitable candidate afterwards.

## 7. MoU

The process of the MoU update is ongoing, members are in the process of providing feedback.

#### **a. Members**

The members who haven't sent the feedback and comments on the first version of the MoU will send this to Janssen via email. Janssen will combine the notes/questions/changes and will share this document again.

#### **b. Observers**

For the observers, the renewal of the MoU could be an opportunity to become a member. Therefore they are being asked to explore if they can join as partners..

#### **8. Next meeting**

The next meeting will be an online meeting of 2/3 hours in end of October/beginning of November. Janssen will send around a doodle and fix the meeting date.

#### **9. Any other business**

The next EAS meeting will be in Lausanne and ASTRONET has been asked to provide a SOC member. Giard volunteers and gets the support of the ASTRONET Board members.

#### **10. Closing of the meeting**

Giard closes the meeting at 14:01.