

THE EAS AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

THE PORTUGUESE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

The Portuguese Astronomical Society (SPA) was created in December 1999. It is a Scientific Society founded with the central goal of uniting the young and still small community of Portuguese Astronomers. It presently includes 75 members, of which 66 are effective members, that is, those who actively do research in the field of Astronomy. About 90% of SPA's effective members are below 40 years old, which clearly shows how young is the Portuguese astronomical community. The society is still growing very fast, with new effective members joining every year.

Portugal has a long history in Astronomy, in particular as a result of the importance that this science had for the navigators. In modern times, however, only very recently has Astrophysics started its development in the country. As a sign of the changes over the last 15 years, the community has grown over this period from a few (less than ten) to more than 60 researchers with a Ph.D. in Astronomy. This development happened mainly as a consequence of the Portuguese participation in international institutions, namely the European Southern Observatory (a cooperation agreement was signed in 1990, and Portugal became a full member in 2000), and more recently, the European Space Agency (in 2001). The root of this development was a strong national investment, since the late eighties, in training young graduates in Astronomy. Many of these graduates have conducted their doctoral work abroad, in other European countries. Some of these are still working abroad (about 30% work outside Portugal), but most of the members of SPA are now integrated in one of the research centres created in Portugal in the last 15 years. The financial effort was directly provided by the portuguese government who had the will to build a competitive community, at the international level, in this field.

In 1991 the first National Meeting for Astronomy and Astrophysics was organized in Porto. Since then the task of organizing this Meeting rotates through the different institutions interested in Astronomy and Astrophysics research. The 2002 edition will be the 12th. SPA has inherited the task of ensuring that the National Meeting is organized every year, by working in close collaboration with the host institute. This

annual meeting has grown in size every year, with the scientific importance also steadily increasing.

As a result of the way in which the community has grown, portuguese astronomers have very strong links to many institutions in Europe and in the United States, with whom they maintain strong collaborations. A sustained investment by Portugal in Science in general, and in Astronomy in particular, will hopefully allow Portugal to reach the european level in the numbers of Astronomers per active population. That would correspond to a further growth of about 100% relatively to the present numbers.

The SPA has joined the European Astronomical Society (EAS) in 2001, as an affiliated society, in a move to further strengthen our links with european colleagues. For a small community such as ours it is important to reinforce the visibility and the institutional links. After joining the EAS, and following the proposal by its president at the time – Prof. Jean-Paul Zahn – the SPA has accepted the task of organizing the Joint European and National Astronomical Meeting for 2002. In spite of SPA's small size, such an opportunity provides a unique way to present ourselves to our european colleagues, and hopefully mark a new phase of maturity for Portuguese Astronomy.

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