FOREWORD

The XLVII edition of the Annual Meeting of the Societ Astronomica Italiana was held from April 14 to 17, 2003, once again in Trieste after 29 years. The last SAIt Meeting in Trieste was organised by Prof. Margherita Hack in 1974 during a season of rapid development of the Trieste Astronomical Observatory and my hope is that this is still true for the present time.

There are several historical and scientific reasons that make this SAIt edition special. The first is that this year the Trieste Astronomical Observatory celebrates the 250th anniversary of the "Sovrana Risoluzione" issued on the 20th of August 1753 by the Austrian Empress Maria Theresia of Habsburg with the institution of the "Scuola Nautica" which was the very first Institute where astronomical studies began in Trieste. About one century later, this first nucleus led to the actual foundation of the Osservatorio Astronomico di Trieste.

As for the scientific point of view, the meeting took place few weeks after the release of the WMAP results which had an impressive impact on the astronomical community opening the so called Precision Cosmology Era. In this respect I would like to recall that during the meeting Paolo De Bernardis presented his preliminary results from the Boomerang 2 experiment that flew over Antarctica on January this year. Moreover, on ...., just few days before the SAIt Meeting, a special high-energetic GRB exploded, and it looks to be the key event for finding the solution of the long-standing problem of the origin of these events. The echo of this event brought excitation and lively discussion at the conference.

The Meeting kept the traditional format with invited and contributed talks and a large section of posters. More than 120 participants from many Italian and foreign institutions contributed to the 6 sections of the meeting: Sun and the Solar System, Stars and Stellar Clusters, Compact Objects and Supernovae, the Milky Way and the Local Group, Extragalactic Astronomy and Cosmology, Space Programs. A large fraction of the presented contributions are included in these proceedings.

Special sessions of the meeting were dedicated to updating news on the present development of space projects as well of the national observatories: the Telescopio Nazionale Galileo in La Palma, the Large Binocular Telescope on Mt. Graham and the VLT Survey Telescope on Paranal. We had the pleasure and the honour to have the presence with us of ESO Director General Prof. Catherine Cesarsky, who gave a wide angle overview of the Italian contribution to the ESO development and discussed the past, present and future of the co-operation between ESO and the Italian astronomical community.

The meeting took place about one year after the Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica (INAF), which unified the 12 Italian observatories, has become operative, and in the middle of a new action of the Italian Ministry for Research to reform INAF again with the inclusion into the Institute of the 3 astronomical institutes of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerce (CNR). The final Round Table session co-ordinated by INAF president Prof. G. Setti, with the attendance of the directors of the 3 CNR institutes Prof. G. Tofani, Prof. G. Villa and Prof. P. Saraceno was dedicated to the general discussion of the scientific implications of the reform.

Participants as well as the citizens of Trieste enjoyed a fascinating and intriguing conference held by Prof. Edoardo Boncinelli, director of SISSA, and by Margherita Hack entitled "Siamo soli o ci sono altre forme di vita nel cosmo? Il punto di vista della Biologia e dell'Astrofisica".

The meeting was sponsored by the Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the Provincia di Trieste, the Assessorato ai beni Culturali del Comune di Trieste, Insiel, Illy Caffe and Loyd Adriatico. I would like to warmly thank Dott. Giorgio Rossi of the Comune di Trieste and Dr. Galletto of the Provincia di Trieste who honoured the opening ceremony with their presence.

I would like to acknowledge the other co-organizing Institutes: the Astronomical Department of the Trieste University and SISSA. A special thank to the SOC members with its chairman Mario Nonino and to all the technical and administrative staff of the Trieste Observatory for their essential contribution to the organisation of the Meeting. Finally I wish to thank Léo Girardi and Simone Zaggia for their excellent job in editing the proceedings.

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