15 Mio € EU funding for the Opticon-RadioNet Pilot Project (ORP)

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The European Commission will provide 15 million Euro in funding to a consortium of 37 astronomical institutions from EU and UK. The goal of the Opticon-RadioNet Pilot Project (ORP) is to enable and facilitate scientists to share between the partners observing time at optical and radio telescopes.

Within the RadioNet program top-class radio telescopes were available, including MPIfR's 100-m radio telescope at Effelsberg, and the APEX submillimeter telescope in Chile. And the OPTICON alliance pursued a similar concept within visible wavelengths. Now, as a next step, the entire diversity of optical and radio astronomical infrastructures in Europe will be brought together under one roof.

EU-funding under the Opticon-RadioNet Pilot Project (ORP) will be used over the next four years to provide astronomers with reciprocal access to the best ground-based telescopes from European institutes. This will include not only their free use, but also training and support in operating the complex infrastructures.

Prof. Anton Zensus, director and head of the Radio Astronomy/VLBI research department at the MPIfR, who will scientifically coordinate the participation of the radio astronomical institutes, is pleased:

> *"Imagine you have a brilliant research idea and need a top radio telescope for it. No obstacle for European researchers. That's because the EU-funded RadioNet network has not only provided astronomers with Europe's best radio telescopes free of charge for 20 years; it also makes observing easier with on-site training and service. Now we have gone a step further and joined forces with optical telescope operators to become even more synchronized in the Opticon-RadioNet pilot project. A great success for all who believe in the European idea. And a great step forward for science. Because astronomical phenomena can only be understood if you have the best observing instruments available."*

However, the Bonn scientists are concerned about the increasing radio interferences from new mobile phone systems. Prof. Michael Kramer, director and head of the Fundamental Physics in Radio Astronomy research department at the MPIfR, says:

> *"If we don't act now, then wide areas of radio astronomical research will no longer be possible in the foreseeable future. I am in particular pleased that, with the help of the approved EU funding, we will be able to develop sophisticated strategies to reduce the interfering signals and their impact and thus be able to continue to maintain the Effelsberg site for radio astronomy."*

Source: Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy via IDW Nachrichten

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