



Restructuring the IAU

— An Interview with New IAU General Secretary
Thierry Montmerle

Q: As the incoming General Secretary of IAU, what are your goals for the next three years?

Prof. Montmerle: I have two main goals: one is helping Division Presidents and Vice-Presidents to implement the new Division structure, and keep a close contact between the Executive Committee, and the other is organizing the next General Assembly in Honolulu.

For the first goal, the process will start with two steps: reassigning the existing Commissions to the new Divisions on the one hand, and organizing the affiliation of all the IAU members to one or more of these Divisions on the other hand. Then, elections of the corresponding “Division Steering Committees” will take place, and the strategy of restructuring for each new Division will be defined by them, after a wide consultation. Once this is achieved, the reviewing process for Commissions will begin. All this will be in the hands of the new Divisions, and my main responsibility will be just to coordinate the efforts, with particular emphasis on the two newly created Divisions on Facilities etc., and on Education etc.

For the second goal, i.e., the next GA – and this is also a consequence of the Division restructuring – I will pay a particular attention to the business meetings of the new Divisions and the new (or renewed, or merged, whatever) Commissions. Of course, the scientific program is very important and really is the driving force behind the organization of GAs, but the mutual interactions



Prof. Thierry Montmerle, IAU new Secretary General (2012-2015).

of IAU members within the IAU structures (Divisions, Commissions and Working Groups) is also very important. This is especially true since the whole new structure of the IAU, which I expect to be very different from now, should be in place and running for the first time in Honolulu.

Q: Can you describe the purpose of the changes in Division structure?

Prof. Montmerle: The main purpose is simply Darwinian, if I may say. That is, to propose a new

organization that allows for change and adaptation to a rapidly changing world, both in astronomy and in society. It is a matter of fact that, for many reasons, the IAU Divisions and Commissions have not shown a single sign of evolution in nearly 20 years after their introduction. Yet everybody will agree that astronomy has undergone tremendous changes during that period, and the outstanding success of the International Year of Astronomy has demonstrated the formidable impact of astronomy on society in all parts of the world.

A case in point is that a scientifically important part of the evolution of astronomy has taken place outside of the IAU, either externally, like emerging fields from particle physics (very high-energy gamma-rays, neutrinos, dark matter, *etc.*), or internally, which is even more of a concern for the IAU. For instance, a large part of the activity in small bodies of the solar system has left the IAU to become part of new structures independent of the IAU.

The proposed changes in the Division structure, and their associated reforms (like joining Divisions first, and

Commissions only when appropriate to one's research), should allow more flexibility in creating new structures (like Working Groups to start with) or in replacing existing ones that may have become irrelevant. An important feature is that I expect the Division Presidents to work together as a "horizontal" team, letting ideas flow between them, in addition to the usual "vertical" work towards the Commissions. I would say that this idea of "networking" the Commissions, either via Division Presidents, or being "inter-Division", is a good tool to evolve.

Of course, to succeed such a scheme has to be made to work by a wide range of active people, but I'm confident that, after a short period of adaptation, the IAU members will see all the benefits of the restructuring, both of Divisions and of Commissions.

(This is an interview between new IAU General Secretary Thierry Montmerle and Prof. WANG Jingxiu during the 28th IAU General Assembly. It was originally published in the 10th issue of *Inquiries of Heaven*. The present title is added by *BCAS* editors.)

