

Dear colleagues and friends,

I am glad to welcome you all in the National Astronomical Observatory Rozhen. Astronomy is probably the oldest science. Ever since the dawn of civilization, mankind has been trying to understand the world we live in. today, the Astronomy is a very important part of Physics and many new ideas and developments in Physics have come from Astronomy. This is not surprising, if we consider the limits of physical experiments, carried out in our laboratories. On the other hand, processes in the Universe can take place under extreme conditions, like temperatures, densities, pressure, gravitational fields, electromagnetic fields etc. No doubt, the Astrophysics is now an invaluable source of new ideas and knowledge.

During the last years there is a good tradition in organizing meetings of astronomers from Balkan and neighbouring countries. Several astronomy meetings have already taken place in Romania, Serbia and MN and in Belogradchik. I am very glad that this good tradition now continues in the ongoing scientific cooperation in the South-Eastern Europe, which is, in my view, the best way to integrate the science of our countries with the European science. The National Astronomical Observatory Rozhen is operational since 1981. It is, until now, the biggest astronomical observatory in the SEE. With its main 2m telescope, NAO Rozhen is also biggest research department of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Despite financial difficulties, which are common for all of the countries in the transition to market economy, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences has put a lot of resources to maintain the Observatory and to keep it on the up-to-date level. During the past 23 years of operation, research in NAO Rozhen provided outstanding results, published in hundreds of publications in all renowned astronomical journals.

Most of these publications are achieved in collaboration with astronomers from different European countries. We should point out the large scale of international collaboration in NAO Rozhen, including all countries from our region, all countries from Eastern Europe, Germany, Finland, Norway, France, Italy, UK and many others.

The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences is determined to continue to support the international collaboration in the NAO Rozhen. A recent joint project has been

started in collaboration between Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and MN and Turkey. As I understand, this joint project was approved by UNESCO - ROSTE and will get a support: delivery of a new high performance CCD camera for NAO Rozhen. The BAS will support this project and we hope the collaboration will go on for the benefit of all of us.

I am sure this astronomical meeting will bring up new ideas, new projects and new friendships.

I wish you a successful meeting and successful continuation of your research, after the meeting.

akademician N. Sabotinov
Vice-President of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences