

Goals and Mission of the EURO-VO SAC

8 June 2007

Introduction

The EURO-VO Science Advisory Committee (SAC) has been in existence for over one year, and in order to more clearly define the role of the SAC, a statement of its role and mission will be useful. The SAC can serve many functions, but its primary role, as outlined below, is to act as an advocate for European astronomy and to provide advice to the EURO-VO project with that role in mind.

Motivation

The EURO-VO project embodies an ambitious and far reaching integration of European VO activities under a single organization. Thus its potential impact on the future directions of European astronomy is quite large, and there is a clear need for some form of advisory body that can convey the needs of the astronomy community and evaluate the progress and direction of the project. The EURO-VO SAC has been created to fill this role. Also, because there is currently no Visiting Committee or similar high-level body for the EURO-VO, and because there is as yet no Users Committee or its equivalent, it could be argued that the EURO-VO SAC should fill these roles in part, at least until such other committees are brought into being. It is also important to remember that the SAC is an Advisory Committee, and it should see that as defining its role. Hence the SAC should not be a completely passive committee that simply responds to the wishes of the EURO-VO. The EURO-VO SAC should take an active role in promoting the advance of European astronomy, especially those aspects related to large scale data acquisition, retrieval, and analysis. The SAC should encourage a balanced scientific input for the major subparts of the EURO-VO, and it should promote the integration of VO activities from contributing countries and regions as well as scientific coordination with other VO projects worldwide. The SAC should thus be an advocate for European astronomy, but not necessarily an advocate of the EURO-VO if circumstances show that to be the best course. Other SAC activities, such as proposal evaluation, testing of tools and applications, and advice on interfaces such as websites, are also clearly appropriate. Another area of SAC concern should be the uptake of VO tools and applications by the astronomy community. If the VO concept is to succeed, the VO must become an everyday tool used by a large fraction of the members of the community. As such it must be readily accessible to novice users; if it is only used by a small number of “power users” or only serves to provide demonstrations of end-to-end projects, the VO will fail. The SAC should evaluate EURO-VO efforts in this area, but it is not clear that the SAC should act as a group of “missionaries” to promote the EURO-VO to the community. That is not the task of an advisory committee. With all this in mind, the following “mission statement” for the EURO-VO SAC is proposed:

EURO-VO SAC Mission Statement

The mission of the EURO-VO SAC is to promote the advancement of European astronomy through the use of tools and resources available from the worldwide Virtual Observatory programs. In particular, the EURO-VO SAC is to provide advice and expertise to the EURO-VO in order to optimize the scientific impact and uptake of the EURO-VO project. This activity can include evaluation of both long term and short term EURO-VO objectives and plans, suggestions for specific functionalities and capabilities, and evaluations of the effectiveness of prototype VO tools and utilities. EURO-VO SAC activities can also include evaluation of proposals and public and professional interfaces such as web sites. In addition to these “passive” activities, an important part of the mission of the EURO-VO SAC is to take an active role in bringing to the attention of the EURO-VO project any issues the SAC feels are not properly being addressed by the project. These may range from global objectives of the EURO-VO to more detailed aspects of the program that, in the view of the SAC, are not addressing the current needs of European astronomers.