



A true European scientist

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Abstract. This contribution describes the major role that Nichi D’Amico had in fostering and supporting the European collaborations in the field of the Radio Pulsars, first with the foundation of the European Pulsar Network (EPN) and later with the establishment of the European Pulsar Timing Array (EPTA). All of that quickly produced very important results - leading to the award of the Descartes Prize 2005 - and it is continuing to deliver world class science, involving tens of colleagues across Europe and elsewhere.

Key words. Pulsars. EPN database, EPTA, Descartes Prize

I am grateful that I have the chance to write a few words to remember our friend and colleague Nichi D’Amico. I do this with a heavy heart and several hats, since Nichi and I met in different roles during the last 30 years or so.

1. The first steps towards an European pulsar collaboration

These days, I am director at the Max-Planck-Institut für Radioastronomy in Bonn, but when I met Nichi for the first time in the early 1990, I was a PhD student at this institute. Nichi was already one of these important pulsar astronomers that I looked up to as a student, and I think the first time I met him was when Nichi and others followed an invitation by my PhD supervisor Richard Wielebinski to work on an EU proposal to what later became the successful “European Pulsar Network” or EPN for short. The EPN started in 1994 and it indeed laid the foundation of many European wide collaborations focusing on pulsar science (Lorimer, D’Amico et al 1997). In the EPN, of

course, we used the Northern Cross to observe simultaneously with Effelsberg, Jodrell Bank and Westerbork. Many more projects followed.

Later, after moving to Jodrell Bank, Nichi and I became colleagues in the hugely successful Parkes Multibeam Survey (Manchester et al. 2001; D’Amico et al. 2001) and I remember spending the nights with Nichi observing with the Parkes telescope. He was utterly professional and a reliable partner and colleague, as also always later in other steps of his career. Nichi made things happen, attacking problems and solving them. Even though, I have to say, his survey monitoring software at Parkes was a bit ‘temperamental’ at times. But, he made it work. As he did so often in his career.

2. The Descartes prize and the birth of EPTA

It was on the way back from Parkes, around 2004, when Nichi and I had to wait at Sydney airport, and when we decided to write an application for the EU Descartes Prize. Once back



Fig. 1. The ceremony of award of the Descartes Prize, at the Royal Society in London, in fall 2005. Nichi D'Amico is on the rightmost side. The other people, from the right to the left, are John Seiradakis, Andrew Lyne, Ben Stappers, Alex Jessner, Michael Kramer, and Andrea Possenti.

at home, we did exactly that, and it was a great pleasure that we were awarded this prize in 2005. Figure 1 reports an image of us in London where you can see Nichi and us receiving this award. It was a memorable occasion, recognising the European collaboration that worked so successfully in the past, and which would continue to do so in other forms to.

It was the time, when Nichi, our partners and I were also working on formalising our next collaboration: the European Pulsar Timing Array, EPTA. We were inspired by Dick Manchester's work in Australia, and we realised, as demonstrated by the EPN and the Descartes Prize, that working together with our five telescopes in Europe, we can make a real difference. And indeed, the EPTA had its first meeting in January 2006 (Stappers et al. 2006), shortly after this event in Brussels.

3. The Sardinia Radio Telescope in the European pulsar network

Some years later, it was a very joyful day, when I was allowed to join Nichi's opening of the Sardinia Radio Telescope, which was kind of Nichi's baby. Since then the SRT is an important part of the EPTA, and also of the Large European Array for Pulsars (LEAP) when we are connecting our telescopes once a month, forming a 200-m dish for pulsar timing (Kramer & Champion 2013).

Nichi has always been an unwavering full supporter of these activities. We never had to convince each other that the pulsar collaborations in Europe were not only producing excellent results (e.g. (Ferdman et al. 2010; van Haasteren et al. 2011) for results of the first 5 years of the collaboration), but were also a lot of fun. I have been in many collaborations during the years, but the EPTA – and our collaborations before, like EPN – are by far the

most pleasant ones. We are friends, we trust and we can rely on each other. This is exactly what Nichi stood for. Friendship, Trust and Reliability.

Someone to look up at: a fellow scientist, a collaborator, a partner, a friend. Nichi was all of that. Without him none of these collaborations would be what they are today.

4. A personal thought

Therefore, when I heard the terrible news about a year ago, I was as shocked as every one of you. Incomprehensible news. I had spoken to him only a few days earlier. About MeerKAT, the SKA and the future the he was helping to shape.

I speak in name of all our European friends when I say:

We will never forget Nichi, and we will be always grateful for his guidance and insight. He was a true European, a brilliant pulsar astronomer, and an unforgettable partner and friend.

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