



INTERNATIONAL  
ASTRONOMICAL  
UNION  
**1919 - 2019**

IAU@100 day, Observatoire de Paris/IAP: Oct.4, 2019

Astronomers as Diplomats:  
When the IAU builds bridges  
between nations

# Germany joining the IAU: A complicated Story

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(largely based on a talk by Roland Wielen @ IAUS 349, Vienna GA 2018)

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Chairman of Rat deutscher Sternwarten

# Problems due to the Initial Statutes of the IAU from 1919



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Rules for membership in the IAU in 1919 (and in the International Research Council, IRC [ later ICSU, now ISC ]) were based on political motivations after World War I:

Founding members of the IAU:

“Allied Powers”: France, England, USA + 10 others

Possible additional members:

“Neutral” countries: The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, ...

Excluded from membership:

“Central Powers”: Germany, Austria, Hungary, ...

# Problems within Germany



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- Future role of the internationally orientated “Astronomische Gesellschaft (AG)” ?
- Possible use of the German language at the IAU (in addition to English and French) ?
- Disregard of Germany by IRC and IAU ?
- Financial problems (IAU membership fee) ?



Astronomische Gesellschaft  
German Astronomical Society

# Astronomische Gesellschaft (AG)

- *Astronomische Gesellschaft* founded in 1863 in Heidelberg as an international astronomical society
- *Astronomische Gesellschaft* had many non-German members and board members
- Unclear in 1919+: What should be the future role of *Astronomische Gesellschaft*, especially with respect to the IAU ?

# Examples for international board members of *Astronomische Gesellschaft* (AG)



- Presidents (“Vorsitzender”) of *Astronomische Gesellschaft*:  
Otto Wilhelm von Struve (Pulkovo, Russia)  
AG President 1867-1878 (Board member since 1863)  
Elis Strömgren (Denmark)  
AG President 1921-1930 (Board member since 1914)
- Vice-President of *Astronomische Gesellschaft* 1930-1937:  
Sir Arthur Eddington (England), AG member 1913-1944  
(IAU Vice President 1925-1928, IAU President 1938-1944)

# Some famous international members of Astronomische Gesellschaft (AG)



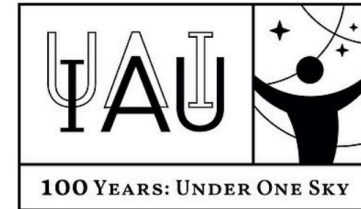
Astronomische Gesellschaft  
German Astronomical Society

- Félix Tisserand (France) AG member 1869-1896(d) + Board member
- Simon Newcomb (USA) AG member 1873-1909(d) + Board member
- Henry Poincare (France) AG member 1905-1912(d)
- \* Willem de Sitter (Holland) AG member 1909-1934(d)
- \* Bertil Lindblad (Sweden) AG member 1922-1945 + Board member
- \* Otto Struve (USA) AG member 1923-1965(d)
- Harlow Shapley (USA) AG member 1925-1945
- \* Bengt Strömgren (Denmark) AG member 1926-1987(d) + Board member

\* acted as President of the IAU                      (d) = also the year of his death

Side note: Albert Einstein member of the AG since 1921, but never of the IAU,  
especially not of IAU Commission No.1 on Relativity

# Steps of IAU towards a German participation



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1926: IAU EC informs the President of *Astronomische Gesellschaft*:  
an application of Germany “will be very welcome”

(Problem: Germany not a member of the IRC)

1928: IAU President Willem de Sitter (1925-1928)

invites individual astronomers to attend IAU GA at Leiden 1928,

Attendance: from Germany 14, Austria 1, Hungary 2

1931: IAU adapts its Statutes:

All countries (including Germany, Austria, Hungary) may now  
adhere to IAU, even if they do not adhere to the IRC/ICSU

# Steps of Germany towards IAU membership



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1931: Formation of an ad-hoc committee („Elferausschuß“)  
for considering Germany’s IAU membership

1932: Establishment of a permanent committee  
„Ausschuß der Deutschen Astronomen“ (ADA)  
(“Committee of the German Astronomers”)

Chairman: Max Wolf (Heidelberg), also President of  
*Astronomische Gesellschaft*

Official name of ADA in English:

National Committee of Astronomy (IAU)

## 1932: Decision of ADA on Germany's IAU membership:



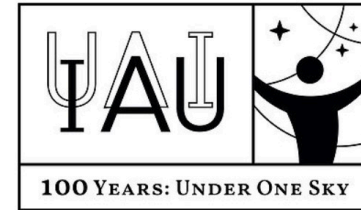
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- (a) Germany should become a member of the IAU in the future
- (b) but presently impossible for financial reasons  
(Germany's IAU membership fee of 3600 Goldfrancs not available at present )

1932: August Kopff (ARI, Berlin) announces this decision  
at the IAU General Assembly in Cambridge/Mass (USA)

Kopff's speech [ in German (!) ] is reproduced in full length  
in the Transactions of the IAU !

# Years from 1933 to 1939



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- No progress on Germany`s desired IAU membership
- No relevant documents available
- Retardation most probably caused by lack of finance
- Delay probably not due to political interferences (NS), since other sciences were able to apply for membership to international bodies
- IAU Presidents hoped that Germany may join IAU soon (Speeches at IAU GA Paris 1935 and IAU GA Stockholm 1938)
- At least: German astronomers were invited to IAU GAs, German astronomers became members of most IAU Commissions

# Situation after World War II:



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## Strong supporters of Germany's membership in IAU:

- Harold Spencer Jones (IAU President 1944-1948)
- Bertil Lindblad (IAU President 1948-1952)
- Bengt Strömngren (IAU General Secretary 1948-1952)

## Probably a very helpful signal:

August Kopff (German delegate at the IAU GA 1932 in Cambridge/Mass.) was elected "Honorary Member" of the American Astronomical Society (AAS) in June 1949

# Solution after World War II:



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Finally in 1951: Germany becomes a member of the IAU  
(decision of the IAU EC , letter by IAU GS of March 1951)

Since 1951: Adhering Organisation of Germany to the IAU:  
*Astronomische Gesellschaft (AG) !*

# History of the IAU

The Birth and First Half-Century  
of the International Astronomical Union

Adriaan Blaauw



International Astronomical Union

Kluwer Academic Publishers

## 8.c.2 Adherence of Germany

Adherence of Germany was – finally! – established at the 1952 Assembly. After introductory correspondence between IAU President Lindblad and Friedrich Becker, President of the Astronomische Gesellschaft, General Secretary Strömngren, by letter of March 17, 1951, informed Becker that the IAU recognized this organization as the adhering body for all of Germany, i.e. for both the Eastern and the Western zone, and by letter of 24 April, 1951, this was acknowledged by Becker [9].

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Admission of other nations from former “Central Powers” to IAU:

1947: Hungary

1955: Austria (delayed by financial problems ?)

1957: Bulgaria

1961: Turkey

# **New Problem** during the Cold War Period



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In 1962: Deutsche Demokratische Republik (“East Germany”) became an additional/independent member of IAU

The IAU had now “two Germanies” as members !

Adhering Organisation of the Federal Republic of Germany (“West Germany”):

not any more *Astronomische Gesellschaft*, but now:

„Rat Westdeutscher Sternwarten“ (RWS)

“Council of West German Observatories”

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After 1963, when the Cold War (see below) would lead to virtually complete separation of East and West Germany – it was the year in which the Berlin Wall was built – the astronomers from West Germany adhered through the Rat Westdeutscher Sternwarten and those of East Germany through the Berlin Academy of Sciences.

# Good Situation since 1990



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October 3 1990: German Re-unification („Wiedervereinigung“):  
East Germany (Deutsche Demokratische Republik, DDR) disappears!  
Only one (unified) Germany is a now member of the IAU.

(Slight problem: IAU lost the fee of East Germany)

Adhering Organisation of IAU for Germany since 1990:  
„Rat Deutscher Sternwarten“ (RDS, Council of German Observatories)

RDS since 2012 official (sub-)organisation of *Astronomische Gesellschaft*:  
President of *Astronomische Gesellschaft* usually also Chairperson of RDS

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The adherence made an end to what had been a dragging question over several decades. In his acceptance speech upon undertaking the Presidency of the Union before the conclusion of the Rome Assembly, Otto Struve said

“- - - there was the admission of Germany. This action represented the healing of a wound which had threatened the very life of the Union from its beginning.” [11]

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Otto Struve (USA), IAU President 1952-1955,  
at the end of the IAU GA 1952 in Rome:

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the Presidency of the Union before the conclusion of the Rome Assembly,  
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