Welcome from the University of Berne

Urs Wuergler, Vice-rector

Ladies and gentlemen,

The opening of symposia or workshops at the University of Berne is one of the more enjoyable duties of the university's directorate. Such events indicate that the research work performed by the university's entities is relevant and meets international standards. As a side remark I should perhaps mention that it would have been difficult for me to decline the request by Gerhard Beutler, because we were in essence studying at about the same topics simultaneously and at the same place (with different emphasis, however).

According to our understanding, the Astronomical Institute deals with fundamental astronomy in research. This is undoubtedly one of the oldest branches of astronomy, one might even get the impression that attributes like old fashioned or even outdated could be appropriate. This workshop proves the contrary: Research in fundamental astronomy is performed with the most advanced tools, namely Global Navigation Satellite Systems, high-performance satellite receivers, and very advanced software tools. The results are very broad in nature and they are truly remarkable. Results inc1ude the monitoring of the continental drift so-to-speak in real time, the determination of the Earth's rotation axis and of the length of day.

Research of this kind obviously must be internationally coordinated. We understand that the coordination in this field of science is performed by the International GPS Service (lGS), the tenth birthday of which is celebrated by this workshop and by the symposium on Wednesday. The number and the importance of the institutions working together in this service and represented here is most impressive.

From our perspective it is amazing that not only so-called “big” research institutions, but also small academic entities are able to contribute to such a big international, even global, research effort. We are of course particularly proud that the Astronomical Institute is a respected partner in this enterprise. Its involvement in the IGS as a “full-blown” Analysis Center, as chair of the IGS Governing Board over a time interval of about seven years, and as IGS Analysis Coordination Center, were seemingly viewed positively by the international community.

When preparing this speech I made two observations, which may be of some interest at least for the directorate of the University:
The Astronomical Institute’s CODE (Center for Orbit Determination in Europe) Analysis Center was producing satellite orbits, station coordinates, Earth rotation parameters, etc., for every single day since June 21, 1992. It looks like holidays and such things are unknown at this entity and – even more interesting – it seems people working there are very happy with this system. The transportability of this model to all the other university units will of course be studied in the near future. I learned at school that the days, as defined by the Earth's rotation, should get longer due to tidal friction. This is what Gerhard and I learned at our university about forty years ago. I was of course counting on this effect when planning my working days at the university. But now I see that – at least since the IGS became active in 1992 – the opposite is true: The days become considerably (about two milliseconds) shorter since the creation of the IGS. We hope that this development is not caused, but only monitored by the IGS. Otherwise the University of Berne's involvement in the IGS would have to be reconsidered.

Let me stop here. I wish you all a very fruitful week of scientific discussions and most enjoyable days at our university and in the beautiful city of Berne. The University of Berne is proud to host an IGS Workshop for the second time. It is up to you all to make this workshop a success. I hope that my successor in 2014 will be able to look back at the IGS achievements in a similarly positive way.