Germany Sets Up New Space Agency

Bonn

After almost 30 years acting as a junior partner on some of the world's major space programs, West Germany has decided to stake its claim to independence in space. A new agency is being established to fund and manage the country's space program, a move that should give the program added political clout both domestically and abroad.

The agency, known as the Deutsche Agentur fur Raumfahrtangelegenheiten (mercifully abbreviated to DARA), will be a government-funded private company based in Bonn. It will bring together the space-related activities of the ministry of research and technology, which is now primarily responsible for developing space policy, and the more practical activities of the Cologne-based German Aerospace Research Establishment.

"The aim is to improve the management of our space program," says research ministry spokesman Michael Hackenbroch. He adds that the new agency, whose initial budget will be about $1 billion, is intended to provide government subsidies to large-scale projects faster and more efficiently.

The decision to establish an independent agency has been welcomed by Germany's powerful aerospace companies, which have long complained of the political and bureaucratic difficulties caused by the fragmentation of responsibilities between the ministry and the Cologne research establishment. There is, in fact, widespread speculation that the automobile giant Daimler Benz demanded the creation of the new agency as a condition for taking a major stake in the country's leading aerospace manufacturer, Messerschmit-Bölkow-Bohm (MBB)—a move favored by the government, although it is currently blocked by the Federal Cartel Office. The merger is expected to make the German aerospace industry more competitive in world markets.

"Placing all responsibility in one pair of hands, and having a private organization administering government funding, will mean that project management will become better and more efficient," says MBB space scientist Ernst Hoegenauer.

In addition to its domestic projects, MBB has been the lead contractor for a number of major space projects planned through the European Space Agency, including the shuttle-launched Spacelab. It is also responsible for the Eureka space platform, and will play a large role in constructing the laboratory module due to be integrated into the U.S. space station as the central part of ESA's contribution to the project, known as Columbus.

Germany's academics are not all wild about the new agency. Some argue that its creation will benefit the whole field of space-related activities by giving it a greater and more coherent political profile. But, like many U.S. space scientists who worry about the impact of the space station on research programs, others contend that the agency—and thus Germany's space efforts—could become dominated by technology-led programs, to the detriment of space science.

"It is very possible that our budgets will be cut in favor of financing larger projects," says Hans Elsässer, scientific director of the Max Planck Institute for Astronomy in Heidelberg. Elsässer, like many of his scientific colleagues, is particularly concerned about the impact on space science of Germany's commitment to international technology-based space programs, such as the French-designed space plane Hermes and NASA's space station. "Such projects advance technology, but not science," says Elsässer.

German leader Helmut Kohl, speaking in Paris last month on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the European Space Agency, made a strong rhetorical commitment to continued support for basic space research, however. He also signed on to a proposal that could have some interesting political ramifications: that ESA should consider launching satellites designed to monitor the observance of arms control agreements independently of the United States. This idea has long been promoted by the French government, which is keen to develop a military version of its remote sensing satellite SPOT.

Ironically, however, one of the implications of creating the new agency—which follows similar moves in Britain and Italy—is that it could lead to fragmentation of European space efforts, as each country discovers that it is capable of doing on its own what could previously only be carried out through international cooperation. "It's sad for Europe," says Hoegenauer of MBB. "But it is a consequence of competition between partners."

■ **DAVID DICKSON and DON KIRK**

Researchers Irked by Changes to Testimony

Twice in the last several months, anonymous officials in the Bush Administration's Office of Management and Budget have taken it upon themselves to alter the congressional testimony of government scientists. Not only the scientists reporting these incidents but also key congressional leaders are angry. Denouncing the White House intervention as censorship, Senator Albert Gore (D–TN) said, "The Bush Administration is acting as if it is scared of the truth."

The latest instance involved testimony by James Hansen, director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York. Hansen was one of seven scientists who spoke before Gore's science subcommittee about global warming on 8 May.

Gore asked them whether the greenhouse effect might depart from the gradually increasing curve that computer models have been producing and suddenly become far more pronounced.

Hansen, for one, was prepared to testify that models may indeed underestimate the heating effect. But because his lab is funded by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and because OMB sees to it that policy statements of government employees are consistent with the Administration's line, he was required to submit his testimony to the OMB for the usual clearance.

During the OMB review, an anonymous author, according to Hansen, inserted a paragraph in his testimony, as follows: "Again, I must stress that the rate and magnitude of drought, storm and temperature change are very sensitive to the many physical processes mentioned above, some of which are poorly represented in the [models]. Thus, these changes should be viewed as estimates from evolving computer models and not as reliable predictions."

Hansen tried to get the word "reliable" removed, but failed. He thinks that his assessment of the science is not a policy matter, and, furthermore, he argues that it is quite reliable. It would be wrong to suggest that any other view is more reliable. In addition, he adds, "The use of the first person is a little disturbing," but "I did not try to get them to change that."

Another witness, Jerry Mahlman, director of the U.S. Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory in Princeton, New Jersey, said he "experienced a more subdued version" of the same kind of editing when he submitted testimony to OMB for review last February. The office added "a lot of comments that I found objectionable and not scientifically accurate." He said he found this "unacceptable." "We demand the right to be wrong; otherwise we squelch the right to be creative," he said.

■ **ELIOT MARSHALL**