

lations by asking agency scientists what additional studies need to be done before program offices can propose a new rule. Such an "analytic blueprint" would improve the quality of a proposed regulation, she says, as well as strengthen the agency's ties to its constituency of scientists, environmentalists, and industry representatives.

But Browner has yet to act on several "Credible Science" recommendations, including the hiring of four to six "world-class" scientists for EPA's in-house research program and shifting more research dollars to academic researchers (who now receive an estimated 10% to 20% of the agency's re-

search budget). She has also failed to ease problems caused by a crackdown on abuses by contractors that has sharply eroded the ability of scientists to do research (*Science*, 29 October 1993, p. 647).

Browner says the Administration's efforts to reduce the federal payroll have hampered her ability to hire scientists. And "one of my greatest frustrations" since coming to the agency, Browner says, is how much time EPA scientists must spend managing contractors rather than doing research. Both problems may soon be alleviated, however: *Science* has learned the Administration will let EPA hire more full-time employees in 1995, allowing

Browner to convert some contract researchers into EPA employees and to fill other positions with outside scientists.

With the environment a key issue for Vice President Al Gore, the White House is keeping a close eye on Browner's progress. And despite a spotty record to date in reforming EPA's science, most scientists are rooting for Browner to succeed. "When I first met Carol Browner, I was overjoyed," recalls Walker. "I got the impression she really, truly cared about science at EPA." He pauses for several seconds, then adds, "I still believe she cares."

—Richard Stone

MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

Italy Throws EMBL Into Turmoil

Fotis Kafatos, director-general of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), seemed to be well on the way to securing the lab's future just before Christmas. In a meeting at EMBL's Heidelberg headquarters, the lab's 15 member states backed "in principle" Kafatos' plan to spread research funds around by establishing a network of small EMBL-sponsored groups at centers across Europe (*Science*, 17 December 1993, p. 1807). This was expected to be enough to satisfy some countries' concerns that they hadn't been getting their money's worth from their EMBL contributions. But on 28 December, Kafatos' New Year celebrations were ruined when the Italian government dropped a time-bomb into his lap: formal written notice of Italy's intent to pull out of EMBL—an unprecedented move that throws the lab's future into jeopardy, because Italy provides 12% of EMBL's \$50 million annual income.

To compound Kafatos' problems, Italian Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi resigned last week, dissolving his transitional government and making any rapid change of heart impossible. "I really cannot say very much," a bitterly disappointed Kafatos told *Science* last week. "The reality is that I'm gathering my thoughts, the thoughts of the lab, and—very importantly—the thoughts of the [national] delegates."

Italy had threatened to quit last year because Italian scientists are underrepresented among the staff at EMBL's headquarters. By launching his "regional groups" program with four labs in Italy (and another in Spain), Kafatos hoped to head off the Italian threat. That hope is now dashed, but Italy has not yet closed the door on EMBL completely. The withdrawal cannot take effect until next January, which gives lab officials some breathing space, and the Italian notice came with a statement explaining that the decision "is intended to stimulate, within Italy and EMBL, a wide-ranging and deep

analysis" of the reasons for Italian scientists' low involvement in EMBL. This debate may, the statement goes on, lead to "a relaunching of Italian collaboration in the European framework, including more positive developments vis-à-vis EMBL itself." These cryptic words, say Italian sources, mean that if the lab offers Italy more than the four regional groups promised so far, then it might not leave. The problem, however, is that this will require more money, which EMBL doesn't have.

Italian research minister Umberto Colombo could not be reached for comment last week. But Arturo Falaschi, director of the International Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Trieste, says that the offer of just four regional groups was the final straw. Falaschi says a figure of ten was discussed at a meeting in Rome last October with Kafatos and Bernhard Hirt of the Swiss Institute for Experimental Cancer Research, then president of EMBL's governing council.

Hirt, however, denies that any promises were made. "There was no secret deal," he says, adding that it was made clear that the ten-group estimate assumed a 5% growth in EMBL's budget, which its member states refused to consider in December.

With little hope that the other EMBL states will agree to increase their contributions to accommodate Italy, EMBL lab chiefs have been asked to draw up contingency plans for 1995, assuming no Italian funding. As most of EMBL's budget is locked into salaries and cannot be cut, new initiatives—such as the European Bioinformatics Institute now being set up in Cambridge, U.K. (*Science*, 18 June 1993, p. 1741) and

the planned expansion of the EMBL facility in Grenoble, France—could be severely squeezed.

Many Italian biologists are dismayed by these events. "Isolation is always the beginning of death," says cell biologist Jacopo Meldolesi, director of the Department of Biological and Technological Research at Milan's San Raffaele Hospital, who argues that Italian molecular biology needs to increase its contacts with EMBL, not sever them. Riccardo Cortese, a former EMBL program leader who heads the Institute for Research in Molecular Biology in Pomezia, near Rome, is exasperated that his government—having won recognition that Italy's future involvement in EMBL must be increased—has allowed the debate to degenerate into penny-counting. "The issue now is a much smaller and less noble one," he says.

Meldolesi and Cortese are spearheading an effort to get the decision to withdraw reversed, bombarding the research ministry with faxes and telegrams of complaint.

But with the government now awaiting elections in March, it is unclear what effect that campaign will have. The elections are expected to decimate the number of seats held by Italy's discredited Christian Democrat and Socialist parties, probably leaving the former communists of the Party of the Democratic Left as the largest bloc in parliament. The best hope for EMBL, it seems, is that this new government will be keen on pan-European initiatives. The problem with the debate over EMBL's future, laments Hirt, is that national considerations take center stage: "The word Europe is never mentioned."

—Peter Aldhous



Fax campaign. Riccardo Cortese, trying to get the government to change its mind.