

Science Law Advances Despite Criticism

MOSCOW—Six months ago, Russia's first basic law on science was actually three rival laws, each promoting a different view of the status of Russia's scientific bodies and the rights of researchers. This month, it re-emerged as a single law, after 6 months of redrafting at the hands of a conciliation committee appointed by the subcommittee on science of the Duma, the lower house of Russia's parliament. The sponsors of the draft law think it now stands a good chance of passing, but the rival factions in Russian science remain loudly critical of it.

The science law is intended to define the pecking order in Russia's science organizations, which has been ambiguous since Boris Yeltsin's government created the Ministry of Science and Technological Policy to oversee the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) and the other "branch" academies—once the all-powerful controllers of Soviet science. The confusion over the three science laws is symptomatic of the power struggle between the ministry and the RAS: One of the three original drafts was written by the ministry and seeks to turn the academies into state bodies, answerable to the ministry, while the second represents the position of the RAS and calls for independent academies to serve as the "supreme bodies" in Russian science. The third draft law was put forward by the reformist Yabloko faction in the Duma. It seeks to protect the rights of scientists to carry out research and seek funding from various sources.

None of these original versions was expected to have enough support in the Duma. But when the amalgamated law was presented to a meeting of parliamentarians, science administrators, and other experts earlier this month, it got a concerted thumbs down. Andrei Gonchar, vice president of the RAS, attacked the law's definition of scientific academies as "state scientific organizations which are established by the federal government." Gonchar proposed instead that the RAS have a hybrid state-public status. Viktor Shevelukha, vice chair of the Duma committee on Culture, Education, and Science, replied that he too would personally prefer such a mixed status, but said it would contradict Russia's civil code.

The status of the RAS is not just a matter of prestige, Science Minister Boris Saltykov told *Science*. It's central to the issue of whether the RAS owns the real estate, institute buildings, and other structures and equipment in its care—as the RAS has been insisting since the dissolution of the Soviet Union—or simply manages them. Saltykov explained that if the RAS is a state body, Russian law stipulates that it can only man-

age federal property and real estate. If, on the other hand, the RAS is a public body, Saltykov says, it would run afoul of the privatization law, which limits the right to own former state property.

Critics also complained that the new law was vague in its definition of science and did not include the social sciences and humanities. "I'm not completely satisfied with how science is determined in the draft," says Saltykov. His deputy, Andrei Fonotov, added that the law tries to lay down specific rights for researchers—an effort he considers misguided. Fonotov pointed to passages that seemed naive and ridiculous, such as "a researcher has the right to apply for participation in international scientific collaborations." Mikhail Glubokovsky, also a vice chair of the Duma committee, replied that although this may sound ridiculous to a resident of Moscow, for a provincial researcher it is a revolutionary idea.

Although there were plenty of other criticisms, the deputies felt they could not go on revising the law forever. "The law is imperfect," says Fonotov, "but nevertheless it should be sent to the Duma at least to stimulate the process of its discussion and improvement." After some minor adjustments by the conciliation committee, the draft was presented to the Duma, where the first of three debates on it will begin on 7 July.

Glubokovsky thinks that because the Duma deputies have little knowledge of science, the science subcommittee members will have a major influence on any amendments. As a result, he thinks, the law could be passed by the Duma without significant changes. If that happens, and the RAS officially becomes a state body, it may finally lose its battle for ownership of its institutes' property. It would also come under closer scrutiny by the ministry, which could force it to give fuller account of the huge sums of government money it receives.

—Andrey Allakhverdov

Andrey Allakhverdov is a journalist in Moscow.

THE NETHERLANDS

R&D Increase Targets Industry

AMSTERDAM—The Dutch government has given research a shot in the arm by making it financially worthwhile for industry to invest more in research and strengthen its ties to academic scientists. The bulk of the money—\$750 million over 4 years—will go toward tax incentives to companies that increase expenditures on research in the Netherlands, but another \$250 million will be spent on new technology projects, including several centers of excellence. The total package would effectively double the country's current level of R&D spending.

The new programs are outlined in a report, "Knowledge in Motion," released last week by economic affairs minister Hans Wijers and minister for education, culture, and science Jo Ritzen. "The choice is to get smart or to get poor," Wijers told a press conference.

The new program is welcome news to researchers struggling to cope with a downturn in government spending triggered by a recession. Since 1987, the Netherlands' total investment in R&D has declined from 2.3% of national income to 1.8% (the average for major industrial nations is 2.3%), while industry's share has fallen from 1.4% to 1.0% of national income. Researchers blame the government for much of the decline, saying it has failed to provide

the necessary leadership. "For a long time we have heard words but seen no deeds," says Alexander Plompen, head of the policy department at the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).

Under the new policy, the level of government funding for large research institutions will be linked to commercial contracts

they win. That's fine with officials at one such institution, the Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research, which has an annual research budget of \$480 million. In addition, \$35 million a year will be spent on "centers of excellence," either expansions of existing research centers or new laboratories. Each will emphasize a field of research already well developed in the Netherlands, such as chemical catalysis. Other areas pegged for extra funds are electronic networks, environ-

mental technology, and vocational training.

Although the NWO's Plompen welcomes the boost in funding, he believes that the increased attention afforded science and the research infrastructure is perhaps more important than the money. Jan Veldhuis, president of Utrecht University, agrees. "It was high time," he says about the government initiative.

—Alexander Hellemans



Get smart. Economics Minister Hans Wijers boosts research funding.