

FRANCE

Research Is Spared the Budget Ax

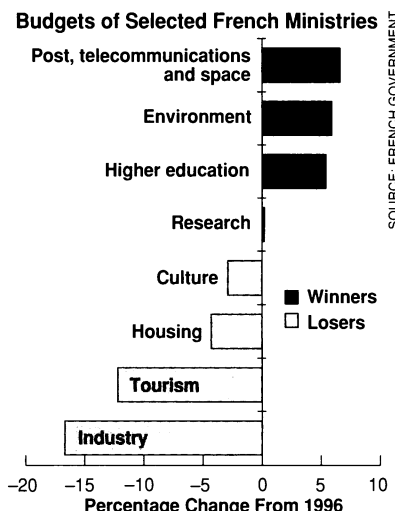
PARIS—French scientists are breathing a collective sigh of relief this week following the announcement of France's 1997 budget on 18 September. Research emerged comparatively unscathed from a frenzy of spending cuts that will produce the most austere national budget in decades. Although overall civilian research and development spending will fall about 1.5% (not counting an inflation rate of about 2.1%), a combination of reoriented priorities and cuts in overheads should protect current spending levels in France's publicly funded research laboratories, and even give a small but badly needed boost to university-based research. Also holding steady are France's space programs, projected at \$1.85 billion for 1997, an impressive 18% of the \$10.2 billion civilian R&D budget.

Although this news might not seem much to cheer about, researchers can count them-

selves lucky to have escaped the wholesale budget slashing prompted by the requirements of the European Union's 1992 Maastricht Treaty. The treaty dictates that member countries must reduce their deficits to 2.9% of gross domestic product (GDP) by

1997 to qualify to join a proposed single European currency. This requirement proved to be a tall order, even for European powerhouses France and Germany. As a result, such sacred cows as France's tourism and culture ministries are reeling from cuts of 12.2% and 2.9%, respectively, and the industry ministry will suffer a major amputation of 16.7%.

In contrast, spending on higher education will rise by 5.4%, and university-based research labs—which have long suffered from lackluster funding levels—will see an increase of 3.7%. Indeed, a 1994 law requires France's spending on research, expressed as a percentage of GDP, to



catch up with that of other major industrial countries by 2005 (*Science*, 24 June 1994, p. 1840). But although French scientists may be relieved that they have been spared from the ax, they are not necessarily being gracious about it. "During the last 3 years research [funding] has already been subjected to a great deal of rigor," says chemist Henri-Edouard Audier of the École Polytechnique near Paris. "There is a limit below which they cannot descend."

But to protect French labs, the government has had to perform a financial juggling act. France's giant public research agencies, including the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and the biomedical research agency, INSERM, will be required to make deep cuts in their administrative costs, as well as encouraging senior researchers to take early retirement so that younger—and lower paid—researchers can be hired.

With the science budget stabilized, the government appears to be contemplating a reorientation of French research spending. A high-level interministerial committee has begun meeting to consider future strategies for the nation's science and technology effort. Although details are scarce, the plan is expected to include greater incentives for cooperation between basic researchers and industry, which the current conservative government has long seen as the most effective way to boost both research spending and the economy.

—Michael Balter

GERMANY

No Respite for International Labs

BERLIN—The German government's proposed cuts in its 1997 research and education budget are encountering opposition from parliamentarians trying to protect domestic research. But the Bundestag's opening debate on the budget this month showed that there is little constituency for the four international research institutes threatened with sharp reductions in German contributions.

As part of the government's austerity measures to meet conditions for joining a single European currency, research and education minister Jürgen Rüttgers is seeking approval for a \$10 billion budget—2.5% less than this year's. He is also trying to streamline Germany's research centers by reducing government regulation, increasing autonomy, and making the funding process more competitive (*Science*, 19 July, p. 305).

If parliament approves, the budget victims at home will include the German space agency, DARA, as well as earmarked research in fields such as geology and maritime technology. Some German research institutions will actually receive more funding, including 5% increases for the DFG research granting agency—which supports much uni-

versity research—and the Max Planck Society. But the news was bleak for the four international labs: the CERN particle physics center near Geneva; the European Southern Observatory (ESO) at Garching, Germany; and the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF) and the Institut Laue-Langevin (ILL) in Grenoble, France (*Science*, 9 August, p. 733). The cuts range from 9.3% for CERN to 3.1% for ESO—a serious blow to the centers, because Germany's contributions are the largest single source of funding for all four labs.

In the initial Bundestag debate on 12 September, members of the opposition Social Democratic Party (SPD) decried the reduction in the research ministry's budget, which Bundestag member Edelgard Bulmahn called "a declaration of bankruptcy." The SPD may try—probably unsuccessfully—to reinstate \$460 million to the ministry's budget for domestic education and research. But an SPD budget expert told *Science* that there is little political support for making a stand over the proposed cuts to the international labs.

Still, Germany cannot cut its contributions unilaterally: The international centers'

councils will have to vote on whether to approve the German cutbacks. Administrators at the European centers are now gearing up for what may be a bruising autumn of discussion over Germany's plans. This week, an advisory committee to CERN's council meets in Geneva to discuss the proposed cuts. Because it will take a unanimous council vote to approve any budget reduction, says CERN spokesperson Neil Calder, "any number of scenarios might occur. This will be a long process."

On 2 October, it will be ESRF's turn, as its council meets to discuss Germany's plans and similar cuts requested by Italy. Because these two nations together contribute about 40% of ESRF's budget, they are likely to get their way in the council's vote. And in December, the ESO council will meet in Garching to discuss the budget. Six of the ESO's eight members must approve the cuts by Germany—which pays 26% of ESO's budget. Norbert König, ESO's chief administrative officer, says "the timing is unfortunate" for Germany's cutback because it might lead other nations to follow suit.

—Robert Koenig

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