



ZAMIR USMANOV/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

**Jilted.** Neutron source at St. Petersburg Nuclear Physics Institute, one of seven centers dropped from special program.

## Russian Institutes Lose Special Status

Seven of Russia's top research institutes are facing an uncertain future following a government decision last week to strip them of their status as State Scientific Centers (SSCs), which had provided a big chunk of their budgets. The demotion was due not to any lack of merit, but to a long-running feud between reformers and conservatives in Russia's scientific establishment.

The SSC system, launched in 1993 by then-Science Minister Boris Saltykov, a reformist, promised stable funding and help paying utility bills to research institutes left stranded when their ministries and the Soviet Union collapsed. A total of 61 were chosen. The Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) strongly opposed the program, as it considered the centers to be rivals to its own institutes for state funding. However, it eventually allowed seven of its institutes to apply for SSC status.

The centers have performed well: A review by an outside panel of prominent scientists recommended to the Cabinet last week that all 61 continue as SSCs. Nevertheless, the government decided to withdraw the seven academy institutes from the program. RAS President Yuri Osipov, who attended the Cabinet meeting, painted it as an altruistic move: "The academy ... cannot overload other budget channels with its own needs," he said.

According to Osipov, the RAS and the science ministry will make up for the institutes' lost

funding. But the two bodies' own budgets have been unstable in recent years. If RAS can't keep its promise, the seven centers—mostly physical science institutes in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Novosibirsk—will suffer heavily. According to German Zagaynov, chair of the Association of SSCs, last year the centers received about \$30 million through the program, which provided up to one-third of their total funding. They will also lose direct access to Cabinet officials.

Says Vadim Ivanov, director of Moscow's Institute of Bio-Organic Chemistry, which is also among the seven: "The employees of my institute are very sorry about all this."

## NSF Budget Is Looking Up

National Science Foundation (NSF) officials hope an unusually warm reception last week from legislators who set the agency's budget will translate into more than the 3% increase in 1998 (to \$3.367 billion) requested by the president.

"I think we can do better," said Representative Jerry Lewis (R-CA) after chairing an all-day hearing of the House panel that writes the NSF spending bill. [NSF's authorizing committee

also seems prepared to increase its budget (see p. 347).] During the hearing, NSF officials made the unusual disclosure that the agency had initially requested a larger budget—roughly \$3.5 billion—but that the White House had turned it down.

Although it may be weeks before the House panel completes its bill, members appear to favor increases in NSF's research and education accounts as well as an accelerated schedule for the agency's proposed renovation of the South Pole station. While the 7% increase sought by a coalition of scientific societies—which squares with NSF's earlier request—may be out of reach, one panel aide says a 5% hike "seems doable." National Science Board President Richard Zare told Lewis the board places a high priority on two new programs—networked computing and research in extreme environments.

Despite the overall positive tone of the hearing, Representative James Walsh (R-NY) grilled NSF on its decision to phase out two supercomputing centers, including a facility at Cornell near Walsh's upstate district, as it begins a new program (*Science*, 4 April, p. 29). Although Walsh suggested more money for the losers during the 2-year transition, Lewis said he didn't think it was needed "at this time."

## Europe to Overhaul Vast Research Program

The European Commission last week announced its plans for a radical shake-up of the European Union's (EU's) main research effort, which has been criticized as lacking in focus (*Science*, 11 April, p. 188). Framework 5, expected to spend at least \$14 billion from 1998 to 2002, "should represent a decisive change from the four preceding programs," the commission said in a statement.

The commission's proposal whittles the 20 funding areas now supported down to six, ranging from ecosystem resources to information technologies. The commission also intends to take tighter control of the program by giving managers, rather than program committees, the power to select and finance individual projects. And to allow more flexibility to respond to emerging research needs such as mad cow disease, the plan would hold back part of the total funds for the six program areas, at the start of Framework 5.

This blueprint for change will get its first real test next month when the 15 member governments debate it in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. EU governments and the European Parliament must ultimately approve the plan early next year.

## New Chief Engineer

After 2 years of turmoil, the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) has a new president. William Wulf, a University of Virginia computer engineer, has been acting NAE president since last July, when the academy membership ousted Harold Liebowitz from the post following a controversial tenure (*Science*, 5 July 1996, p. 22). In the results of a special election announced this week, Wulf defeated Berkeley computer scientist Eugene Wong. Wulf's term expires in 2001.

## Ukraine Offers to Bail Out Top Scientists

Help may be on the way for top Ukrainian scientists anxiously waiting for suspended Western grant payments to resume. The Ukrainian government has crafted a proposal that would partially exempt Western funds from a new tax law that would have siphoned 20% from each grant. But the proposal, soon to go before parliament, may not reduce the tax enough to appease Western organizations.

Several U.S. and Western European groups have suspended at least \$20 million in grants to Ukrainian researchers since President Leonid Kuchma issued the tax decree last fall (*Science*, 28 March, p. 1872). The draft tax law, however, would exempt Western charitable grants—except for the roughly 30% portion designated as salary, making the tax in effect about 6% on each grant.

But the plan may not loosen Western purse strings. "I don't think it will be enough to restart the grants," says an International Science Foundation official in New York City, who explains that the Western consensus is that no taxes should be levied on grants. Ukrainian Science and Technology Minister Volodymyr Semynozhenko, who was in the United States earlier this week to discuss the proposal, says his ministry is ready to kick in extra money to cover the tax if that would satisfy Western grantmakers.