

News from Brussels

● 1995 ERCs Finalised, 1996 Sought

A full programme of 10 European Research Conferences (ERCs) in Physics for 1995 has been agreed by the ERC Steering Committee. It is based on proposals submitted by the EPS Working Group for ERCs, which is now chaired by Robert Pick from Paris who took over as Chairman of the Conference Committee last September when Klaus Bethge stood down after six years in office. Subjects and European Union (EU) funding from the Euroconferences activity in the Human Capital and Mobility (HCM) programme have been assigned for five of the ERCs as they form series; details, however, remain open. The remaining five ERCs have been preselected by HCM with the final decision expected this year.

Robert Pick is seeking proposals by June from the Divisions for 1996 ERCs. It must be appreciated that the EU finance ministers have so far only reached agreement on the overall budget and breakdown into subject areas for the 4th Framework Programme 1994-98. While it is likely that both the Euroconference initiative and support for the ERCs will continue along the present lines in the 744 MECU Training and Mobility activity of the new Framework, it would be jumping the gun to assume that everything will be as before. So few commitments should be expected at this stage for 1996.

● ICPs To Leave When SOCRATES Arrives

Following the Maastricht Treaty, the European Commission has proposed to the European Parliament and Council a programme called SOCRATES that aims to satisfy a general objective to develop education and training. It goes beyond ERASMUS (student mobility and higher education) and LINGUA (foreign languages) by including Community action in schools. The bulk of the 574 MECU sought for higher education in Framework IV continues to be for the familiar student mobility grants (355 MECU) and for promoting the European dimension (188 MECU). However, the SOCRATES proposal envisages the financing of joint activities run by groups of institutions. In keeping with this shift towards direct management by the institutions, the ERASMUS Inter-university Cooperation Programmes (ICP's) which involve organizing cooperation between institutions would be transferred to a system based on contracts with individual institutions.

The Commission feels that ICPs (which are largely run by coordinators along subject

Klaus Bethge, on the right, handing over last year to Robert Pick the chair of the EPS Action Committee on Conferences.



INTAS Funds EPS Library Aid Programme

It has been announced as we go to press that the International Association for the Promotion of Cooperation with Scientists from the Independent States of the Former Soviet Union (INTAS) has asked the EPS East-West Coordination Committee (EWCC) to sign a contract to provide selected institutions in the FSU with essential physics journals. The contract is for 600 000 ECU over two years and the plan is to choose subscriptions from among at least 36 European titles selected on the basis of excellence and impact.

The proposal was submitted to INTAS by Maurice Jacob, the Society's immediate Past-President, soon after the Association was formally created in Luxembourg in 1992 (he had been successful in establishing that publishers were prepared to offer special rebates — an essential feature of the initiative). André Landesman, then Chairman of EWCC, was asked to take charge of the dossier and to coordinate discussions with INTAS; he will now be responsible for the contract, with administrative help coming from the French Physical Society and EPS. EWCC aims to select the institutes and libraries which will receive subscriptions in collaboration with physicists, physical societies and academies in the FSU. The appropriate links have already been established and EPS has also collected a considerable amount of data and information, much of which formed the basis of the proposal to INTAS. They include surveys by the Publications Committee of library needs and the preparation of directories of physics institutes by EWCC. The programme will avoid duplicating existing subscriptions and ensure that the journals are fully accessible in, for example, open libraries. It should thus make a significant contribution towards improving the working conditions of physicists in the former Soviet Union.

lines) tend to be relatively inefficient. Whether it is wise to have university administrations playing a stronger rôle is doubtful. In order to retain the ICPs' vitally important concept of coordinating activities within certain themes and subjects, the Commission is proposing a new, 34 MECU activity called European University Networks to create



ERASMUS: the familiar symbol may disappear when COPERNICUS takes over.

"scientific forums" for "subject analysis and reflection". But true to the new spirit, the Commission emphasises that they must not replace ICPs.

● Small Instruments To Be Considered

The management committee of the large-scale facilities activity in the Human Capital and Mobility programme is expected to approve this month the creation of study panels in ground-based astronomy, free-electron lasers, environmental sciences, social science databases, and analytical instruments. The EC is faced with a variety of requests and proposals in astronomy where it does not have a strategic framework: it would first like to know what research is being done so a questionnaire is envisaged. The free-electron lasers panel will probably think in terms of a dedicated European facility. The instruments panel represents a new departure as HCM is now considering unique collections of small instruments.

The last series of study panels was set up in 1991 and most reported back before Framework III was fully implemented. The facilities covered have for the most part received funding in F-III and the study panels evolved into round-tables where Directors meet to share experience and to publish an annual report (overall coordination would be too strong a term). The round-tables are in supercomputer applications, research in magnetic fields and related areas, earthquake research, oceanography and hydro-

logy, synchrotrons, neutron sources, and high-power lasers. HCM hopes a further step in the evolution of the study panels will materialise when the round-tables lead to proposals for further activities from the perspective of a group of facilities. At this point one may have something approaching a EU policy for large installations.

There of course always remains a basic obstacle for Brussels in promoting the development of facilities. It is simply that Member States resist passing through the EC funds that would return anyway. So investment in infrastructure is barely covered by the existing HCM programme which targets the provision of access for advanced training (there is a little flexibility since up to 60% of a grant to a facility can be for management and equipment needs related to a scientist's stay). The hope is that Ministers will approve a new activity in F-IV that would aim to develop infrastructure by "improving facilities for the long-term benefit". One outcome could more studies of the type described on page 37 for a European Spallation Source, only with fewer constraints on how support is spent.

East-West Deadlines

- *Copernicus*: 2 May 1994. For cooperation between partners in the European Union Members States, central and eastern Europe (C&EE) and countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU). Industrial technologies, with the EU financing co-ordination costs.

- *INTAS*: 8 April 1994. For scientific networks involving the FSU and projects performed jointly by research teams from the independent states of the FSU and member states of the International Association for the Promotion of Cooperation with Scientists from the Independent States of the FSU (INTAS).

- *Scientific & Technical Cooperation with C&EE*: 1 April 1994. For participation by scientists from C&EE in projects being financed by specific EU Framework programmes.