

German research budget robs west to pay east

- Funding state-of-the-art institutes in east
- National labs, in west, are facing cuts

Munich

EARLIER this month, Heinz Riesenhuber, the German Research Minister, announced a generous increase in support for research in the former East Germany, thereby completing the foundation for a competitive research infrastructure in the east. But to finance the increase for the east, Riesenhuber had to slash the budgets of research institutions in the west for 1992 and future years, hitting Germany's 13 national laboratories with cuts of up to 30 per cent over the next three years.

Now, western German researchers are afraid that the shift of funds from west to east will turn out to be a shortsighted manoeuvre that, paradoxically, could hurt eastern as well as western Germany.

Riesenhuber's new 1992 budget gives the research ministry DM9,252 million (about \$5,200 million), which represents a 9.7 per cent increase over the 1991 budget — not very much in light of the fact that Germany's population has increased by more than 25 per cent through unification.

The new budget has plenty of good news for research in the east, however. Riesenhuber committed a total of DM1,600 million to research in eastern Germany in 1992, including financing both for new non-university research institutions and for projects at universities and in industry. Over the next three years, he said, he expected to commit more than DM6,000 million to research in eastern Germany.

The research ministry is planning to establish at least three new national laboratories in the east — an environmental research institute in Halle, a biomedical and clinical research unit in Berlin-Buch, and a newly announced centre for geosciences in Potsdam.

In addition, Riesenhuber said he was in general agreement with recommendations by the science advisory council, the Wissenschaftsrat, to establish Max Planck institutes or research groups in several places in eastern Germany, the latest recommendation being to set up an institute for colloid chemistry and surface science in Berlin-Treptow. Wissenschaftsrat spokesman Wilhelm Krull said it was especially encouraging that the research ministry had been so generous with support for researchers at the new institutions. The average level of ministry support for a researcher at one of the institutions in the east will be DM138,000 a year including salary. Given the low

salary levels in the east, said Krull, this will allow the purchase of significant amounts of new equipment in the first few years.

So much money is being pumped into research in the east, said Krull, that he expects some of the institutes there to be doing state-of-the-art work, especially in applied research, in just three to four years. "Industry is already queuing up" to offer contracts for research at some institutes, he said, and this will be the case at more and more institutes as the new equipment is installed.

Western Germany does not do nearly so well in the 1992 budget. Particularly hard hit are the 13 existing national laboratories, all located in the west. Riesenhuber froze the budget for these laboratories at its 1991 level for the next three years, forcing the laboratories to make cuts equivalent to the rate of inflation, which is expected to be 3–4 per cent a year, or roughly 11 per cent over the next three years.

As the laboratories depend on the ministry for 90 per cent of their support these cuts will hurt, but there is more bad news: Riesenhuber also cut back

development of so-called 'key technologies' such as microchips and high-tech aircraft, the cuts represent a "paradigm shift" in the funding philosophy of the ministry, said Peter Silberbach, an official at the Science Ministry of the *Land* of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Bonn Research Ministry spokesman Walter Mönig denied that the cuts represented anything so ominous or sudden as a paradigm shift. Such reductions have been going on for years, he said.

The Bonn region, and North Rhine-Westphalia in general, stands to be a big loser if the cuts are carried out in as harsh a form as is planned. In addition to the mathematics and data processing society, the German Aerospace Research Establishment in Cologne-Porz near Bonn also stands to lose badly.

Many in Germany are worried about how the new budget could compromise Germany's competitiveness. Hubert Markl, president of the German funding agency Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, has argued that the least effective way to alleviate the "neediness and suffering" of eastern Germany is to cut back on investment in research and development in the west. "Our international competitors are not going to reduce their investment in R&D just because Germany needs to take a unity-induced breather," Markl said.

In at least one sense, making cuts in national laboratories might seem a blessing in disguise, given that the laboratories have long been criticized for being over-

- (1) AWI: Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Ocean Research, Bremerhaven
- (2) DESY: Germany Electron Synchrotron, Hamburg
- (3) DKFZ: German Cancer Research Centre, Heidelberg
- (4) DLR: German Aerospace Research Institution, Cologne
- (5) GBF: Society for Biotechnological Research, Braunschweig
- (6) GKSS: Research Centre Geesthacht, Geesthacht
- (7) GMD: Society for Mathematics and Data Processing, Bonn
- (8) GSF: Centre for Environment and Health Research, Neuherberg
- (9) GSI: Society for Heavy-Ion Research, Darmstadt
- (10) HMI: Hahn-Meitner Institute, Berlin
- (11) IPP: Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics, Garching
- (12) KFA: Research Centre Jülich, Jülich
- (13) KFK: Nuclear Research Centre Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe



Germany's National Labs, mainly in the former West Germany, will bear the brunt of cuts.

drastically on the amount of 'soft' money available for project orientated research, most of which flows to national laboratories and universities. As a result, certain laboratories, such as the Society for Mathematics and Data Processing in Bonn, are facing cuts of up to 30 per cent by the end of 1994.

Because some of the project money from the ministry had been used for the

staffed and inflexible. But Krull of Wissenschaftsrat and others warned that, unless the ministry takes the utmost care in setting priorities — and allows the laboratories to dismiss people who have lifetime contracts — then these cuts could hurt the projects, particularly the newer ones, which are most likely to be internationally competitive.

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