

of ministers, will belong to the foundation, will contribute financially, and will use the foundation as an advisory body on fundamental science. The foundation will include all Western European academies, the qualification for membership being that they finance research. Learned societies without grant-giving powers will not be eligible.

But what will the new foundation do? Initially it will be a talking shop. Sir Kingsley Dunham, Foreign Secretary of the Royal Society, says that "in spite of the plethora of European organisations already in existence, there is still a need for a forum in which to exchange information on what is going on, on both a large and a small scale". A small secretariat will be set up, and the immediate objective will be to sort out areas of science where more cooperation or a change in emphasis on research is needed. It is likely that the foundation's initial budget, contributed by its members, will be about £1 million, some of which will be used to support needy areas—the Flora Europaea programme is one possibility. In time it is likely that the foundation's budget will expand to allow more research to be supported.

Other work could include allocating spare time on accelerators, reactors and telescopes, for example, and laying the groundwork for major cooperative projects such as CERN. It is not intended, however, that the foundation should ever finance such expensive programmes. Multilateral agreements for the exchange of research scientists could be devised. International cooperation in areas where setting up separate organisations would be wasteful can be encouraged—for example in geodesy and geophysics—and such projects as the provision of experimental material for zoologists can be undertaken.

But where the foundation can play its most important role is in providing an overall direction to the hundreds of millions of pounds that the research councils and academies of Western Europe spend between them in sixteen countries.

European governments will have to approve the plan to contribute research council money to a foundation, the Council of Ministers will have to accept the Commission's attitude and the foundation will have to be seen to be doing things early in its existence if it is to be credible. But, as Sir Kingsley Dunham is quick to point out, it will start with an enormous amount of goodwill as it is the creation of the research councils and academies themselves. It is not an organisation imposed from above by governments.

It has been a week of relief and congratulation. Sir Brian Flowers, Chairman of the Science Research Council until this week and a longtime protagonist of the foundation, described the

outcome as very satisfactory, and the enthusiasm governments have evinced towards the foundation—for example Mrs Margaret Thatcher's recent speech (see *Nature*, 244, 248; 1973) to the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee—suggest that there should be few stumbling blocks there.

The constitution should be prepared by May for signature in Stockholm and the foundation could be underway by late 1974 or 1975; a move that would be wise in view of the impending departure of Dr Rolf Dahrendorf from Brussels. Another Commissioner may be less keen to see the research councils running their own show away from Brussels.

## GEOPHYSICS

### Zurich Jamboree

THE first meeting of the newly formed European Geophysical Society was held in Zurich last week. The 500 European scientists present, together with a sprinkling of representatives from the United States, assured the success of the meeting. But young graduate students, from all countries including Switzerland, were conspicuous by their absence.

The concept of a European-wide society to cater for the interests of geophysicists originated at the joint meeting of the International Association of Geomagnetism and Aeronomy and the International Association of Seismology and Physics of the Earth's Interior held in Madrid four years ago. The idea was taken a stage further at a meeting held at the University of Reading in 1971 when a committee was set up, with Mr C. R. Argent of the Royal Society as secretary. It has acted as midwife to the society since then.

Professor Keith Runcorn, of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, said this week that one of the aims of the society is to ensure that European graduate students get the opportunity to present the results of their research to a highly critical international audience. The students will also get the opportunity to hear and meet international experts in all aspects of geophysics. Professor Runcorn, who has been for many years in the forefront of efforts to get the society established, also said that the society should ensure that Europeans will become aware of the possibilities for cooperation with laboratories in other countries. International collaboration is essential to obtain an appreciation of many geophysical problems such as the geology and geodynamics of Europe, said Professor Runcorn.

Emphasis was placed at last week's meeting on interdisciplinary symposia and on topics of special interest to European geologists and geophysicists.

There were sessions on the deep structure of Europe, on which there is new seismic information, and on pelagic sediments, data on which have been recently obtained from drillings in the Mediterranean. The meeting was not only a local affair and the Moon and planets received much attention, with the Mariner 9 photographs of Mars being specially appreciated.

It is no secret that the European Geophysical Society is modelled very much on the highly successful American Geophysical Union and the "frontiers of science" lectures at last week's meeting highlighted the similarity between the two organisations. At Zurich, Professor J. Geiss of the University of Bern, gave a talk on the solar wind and its application to astrophysics and geophysics, while Dr D. McKenzie of the University of Cambridge revealed to his audience the secrets of mantle convection and the Earth's thermal history.

Professor Runcorn wants to see the society provide opportunities for differ-

## Televised Science

If science is to become a part of the background to daily life, rather than being enshrined as some taboo topic which is only understood by coldly efficient white coated experts, James Burke and Dr Who, then the first requirement is that scientific topics should be represented in the media. In Britain today, this means that science must be an integral part of television features.

BBC TV has received criticism in the past for its handling of science features, but at least the features group do produce science programmes, and these are reputed to be the best such programmes produced by any national TV network in the world.

The BBC TV features group have recently announced plans for the coming season, and these include "one off" specials such as *The Life Game* (a programme about "evolution in action"), a series on the lives and work of famous scientists and regular features such as *Horizon*, which will be looking at subjects ranging from pygmies to black holes. In addition, old favourites like *Tomorrow's World* will be on British TV screens each week throughout the next few months. *Nature* will be keeping a close watch on these developments—and on the presentation of science through other media including radio and films—and from time to time will be reporting on the success or failure of the media in presenting science to the public.