

## European Community research

# The RACE is on at last

Brussels

ALTHOUGH prevented by the Italian delegate from formally ratifying any decisions at their meeting on 4 June, the research ministers of the ten countries of the European Economic Community (EEC) nevertheless made several political decisions. The most tangible is the decision to launch the Community's advanced telecommunications programme, RACE (Research in Advanced Communications in Europe). In addition, there were tentative decisions on an advanced informatics programme, Community participation in the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF) and a scheme to provide more access to national facilities.

The Italian blocking tactic came in the form of an insistence by Luigi Granelli, Italian research minister and current president of the Council of Ministers, that any proposal should be dealt with as part of an overall package. By that ploy, Granelli had hoped to prise a formal decision from his nine counterparts finally agreeing to set up the Community's tritium-handling laboratory at Ispra in Italy. A decision was blocked by the United Kingdom and France, both of which have national facilities and object to providing further funds at Community level. It now seems likely, however, that the funds will be found out of the existing budget of the Joint Research Centre at Ispra and that President Bettino Craxi of Italy and President François Mitterrand of France will tie up these and other loose ends at their summit meeting in Florence.

A green light for the definition phase of RACE (see *Nature* 28 March, p.309) was given despite problems in the meeting of the Telecommunications Council on 3 June. This phase will cost six million European Currency Units (ECU) and will last 18 months. It will start in July with the construction of a European reference model for an integrated broad-band telecommunications network that will handle voice, data and video transmissions. As a result of pressure from the United Kingdom and West Germany, the funds proposed by the Commission for the next phase will be reviewed at a later date. The present proposal for the Community to cover half the cost is also to be reconsidered with a view to more industrial participation. On French insistence, the French-chaired European Conference of Post and Telecommunication Authorities will receive a large slice of the definition-phase contract.

The ministers took a positive view of the proposed location of ESRF at Grenoble and have asked the European Commission to consider possible participation. This move could help to ease present problems over the siting of ESRF (see *Nature* 14 March, p.125 and 28 March, p.305), although since the facility has been proposed

in the context of the European Science Foundation, it does not formally come under the jurisdiction of the European Community. But because the problems of the siting of ESRF involve rivalry between member states (Denmark, Italy and France plus West Germany) and because the ministers of the Community long ago agreed to some measure of coordination between national policies and a definition of joint interests in science and technology, the research ministers agreed to set up a general information and consultation procedure between the ten member states and the Commission.

This proposal, from the Italian president, seems to have met with general approval, both from the larger countries such as the United Kingdom, whose stakes include the Neutron Spallation Source at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, and the small countries that fear being left out of the running for important projects and which want fairer geographical distribution

of scientific research sites. West Germany, however, raised the question of just how much access to major research institutes would have to be involved. As a first step, between now and the end of the year, the European Commission is to draw up an inventory of national and intergovernmental scientific laboratories and equipment.

Ministers also considered the Italian-backed Initiative for Research in Informatics applied to Society (IRIS). While the idea has the support of member states, they are not yet prepared to pay for it. Meanwhile, the Commission is to carry out a study of IRIS and to hold a seminar on it in December 1985.

Inevitably the French-backed proposal for concerted research in advanced technologies in Europe (Eureka) also came up for discussion at the research council. But apart from admitting that cooperation will include non-Community countries, officials intend to remain tight-lipped until the Milan summit, at the end of June, where European science and technology will be high on the agenda and at which it is hoped that a series of priorities will be agreed.

Anna Lubinska

## US veterans

# Leukaemia figures in doubt

Washington

A HIGHER than expected leukaemia mortality rate among military veterans who took part in an atomic test in 1957 seems to be a statistical anomaly, according to a National Academy of Sciences study\* that examined mortality rates of veterans who were exposed to similar amounts of radiation in other tests. None of these other groups show a statistically significant increase in leukaemia mortality as compared with the general population.

An earlier study by the Centers for Disease Control had confirmed claims by veterans that an unusually large number of men who took part in the 1957 test code-named Smoky at the Nevada Test Site were dying of leukaemia. But the academy study suggests that chance alone could explain the result.

Approximately 200,000 servicemen participated in atmospheric nuclear tests from 1946 to 1962 at the Nevada site and in the Pacific. The academy study looked at 46,000 who took part in five series of tests in which radiation dosimeter badges were issued to the men.

A review of death certificates and medical records revealed that 10 of the 3,554 men present at the SMOKY test had died of leukaemia by 1982 — 2.5 times more than would have been expected for a similar group in the general population. But the study notes that when leukaemia deaths in the Smiky group are compared

with the leukaemia deaths in all five groups, the difference is not statistically significant ( $P=0.16$ ). In fact, the total number of leukaemia deaths (46) in the non-Smoky groups was slightly less than expected (52). Likewise, the number of deaths from all cancers in the Smoky group (67) was less than expected (84). Data from the dosimeter badges implies that there should have been only 0.2 excess leukaemia deaths in the Smoky group. So if chance is not the explanation for the leukaemia deaths, then either the Smoky dosimeter data are several times too low or the generally accepted estimates of radiation-induced leukaemia dose-response curves are wrong.

Although the study notes that it is impossible to prove that chance alone explained the anomaly in the Smoky group, it points out that the more comparisons that are made, the more likely it is that one will seem to be statistically significant by chance. This is illustrated by the analysis of all five groups for eight different kinds of cancer. A small excess of prostate cancers is found in one group; but there is a one-third chance that when eight independent comparisons are made, at least one will produce a  $P$ -value of 0.5 just by chance.

Veterans' groups have called the report "ridiculous" and complain that it makes no sense to compare the atomic veterans with the general population. Because those selected for military service are healthier than the general population, such comparisons minimize health problems in the veterans.

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