

Soviet plans disturb archaeologists

London

AN important archaeological site in the Crimea is being destroyed by bulldozers on behalf of property developers. Local archaeologists (and astronomers) are protesting strongly to the developers: the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

The site has turned out to be a Byzantine cemetery dating from the fifth to the tenth centuries, and has been under state protection since 1947 when it was declared a conservation area. The main feature of the planned development is a holiday rest home for the academy, which will need a new garage and office block to serve it. The man due to become director of the rest home, Nikolai Zapatskii, claims that the area has also been designated a "test area for scientific equipment".

Archaeologists from the Yalta Historical Museum and the Institute of Archaeology of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences have attempted a rescue dig but, they say, Zapatskii made the normally hectic schedule of rescue archaeology even more difficult by insisting that they kept to a timetable known only to Zapatskii himself.

This pressure seems to have been a breach of the law. Dr Vadim Mosson, a leading Soviet archaeologist who last week delivered the Gordon Childe Memorial Lecture at London University's Institute of Archaeology, stressed that current Soviet legislation states that no construction work may take place at sites of archaeological importance until a proper dig has been completed at the developers' expense, and until the archaeologist in charge has signed a release.

No action has been taken by the academy to prevent destruction of the site, although individual academicians have visited the site or complained to the central leadership. Rauf Munchaev of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR wrote: "Taking into account the unique character of the monument and its great significance for the study of ethnogenesis and cultural history of the peoples of the USSR, no construction work should be possible at this site".

Astronomers have added their complaints to those of local residents and archaeologists. Their concern is that 'seeing conditions' for the new million-ruble telescope planned for the nearby Simeiz observatory will be seriously affected by the light from the new building. G. Khromov of the All-Union Astronomical-Geodesical Society is another of the objectors writing to the academy: "Whatever personal ends the administrative service of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR is pursuing, the interests of our national science should always take first place".

Vera Rich

German university: an education that takes a lifetime

Cologne

A WEST German student finishing his or her last university examination is likely to be three or four years older than a British or French student in the same field. This situation is not new, but it is becoming more worrying in West Germany as 1992 approaches, the year of integration within the European Community.

The Wissenschaftsrat, West Germany's science advisory council, has focused attention on the problem with a study released at the end of April detailing the differences in length of instruction in the humanities and social sciences at West German universities.

The study revealed "astounding differences" in the length of time required to complete a course of study (for a Diplom, the rough equivalent of a US master's degree) in the same field at different universities. In German studies, for example, students in Kiel and Hanover completed their degrees in four semesters fewer than their counterparts in Saarbrücken. A report on the natural sciences will appear at the end of May, and the differences are expected to be just as pronounced in those disciplines.

The Wissenschaftsrat intends that students should use its figures in choosing universities. The resulting shift in attendance, it hopes, will encourage universities to shorten their courses.

Education Minister Jürgen Möllemann

(Free Democrat) has also joined the fray. At the annual meeting of the West German Rectors' Conference here on 10 May, Möllemann said the average study period of seven years would have an "unbearable" effect on West German competitiveness. Möllemann said he would make it a priority to encourage the universities to try to reduce the period from seven years to five.

But Möllemann has a hard fight ahead of him. The unusually long studies in West Germany are due to chronic overcrowding in the universities; to poor planning of examinations by individual faculties; and to the tendency of some faculties to overload their curricula with unnecessary requirements. Kurt Biedenkopf, a former university rector, a member of the Bundestag (parliament) and a national leader of the Christian Democrats, warned Möllemann that if he succeeds in reducing the average length of study to five years, he can expect a "significant increase in unemployment" among university graduates. Staying at university is one way for some students to keep off the dole.

Möllemann also has to contend with the impact of the federal system on West German education. Universities are administered by the Länder (states) in which they are located, which limits the power of the federal government to change the system. **Steven Dickman**

British group makes Soviet deal on seismic station

Moscow

THE British Seismic Verification Research Project (BSVRP) reached a formal agreement with the Soviet Academy of Sciences last Friday to install a seismic station in Central Asia. As under an earlier agreement with the US National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the objective is to gather data contributing to discussions on monitoring a comprehensive test-ban.

Although the British agreement is on a smaller scale than that with NRDC, and does not require reciprocal access to British testing sites, the agreement is taken as a mark of continuing Soviet willingness to have seismic instruments within the borders of the Soviet Union.

Under the agreement, the British group will be able to establish from July a seismic station at Garm in Tadshikistan, 1,000 km from the Soviet test-site in East Kazakhstan. The instrument will be a Güralp broad-band seismometer recording the

vertical component of motion and will be built in Britain.

The intention is that the new station should be established and manned by British scientists for the first few months, after which Soviet scientists will help with routine data-gathering and maintenance. The agreement requires that all data collected shall be made available to both sides.

The signatories for the British group, which has been supported so far by a grant of £17,500 from the Rowntree, Cadbury and Puckham trusts, were Aftab Khan (University of Leicester), Frank Barnaby (writer and consultant on arms control) and Dai Davies (a previously editor of *Nature*).

Those responsible on the Soviet side for the negotiations and the agreement were E.P. Velikhov, deputy president of the Soviet Academy of Science, and M. Gokhberg, deputy director of the Soviet Institute of the Physics of the Earth. □