Russian academy makes deal with US company on journals

Moscow. At a time when courage is needed to invest in the Russian economy, two US organizations are actively competing for the rights to publish hundreds of journals and magazines from the Russian Academy of Sciences. Pleiades Publishing, an offshoot of General Media Inc. (GMI), which publishes *Penthouse* and *Omni* magazines, appears to hold the upper hand in the bidding war, but the American Institute of Physics (AIP) has retained its rights to several well-known journals and hopes to add to its stable

in forthcoming negotiations. Both organizations say that they hope to profit commercially as well as providing a service to international science.

The Russian academy needs outside investors to continue publishing more than 200 journals and specialty publications. Operating costs were once met by its predecessor, the former Soviet Academy of Sciences, but the Russian academy has been unable to pay salaries, much less to purchase needed equipment, since assuming control last year.

That is why academy officials reached an agreement this month with Pleiades to create a successor to Nauka, which now publishes and distributes its journals. General Media, the minority owner but chief source of capital in the venture, has promised to spend several million dollars to upgrade the academy's publishing facilities as well as to publish editions in both Russian and English of an unspecified number of journals and magazines. In return, the company receives 49 per cent of the revenues.

"We've been doing business in Russia for three years", says John Evans, president of GMI International. "We've invested in the market and it offers potential profits, not just from this venture but from other forms of translation that may evolve."

The agreement has made AIP work harder for its slice of the Russian publishing pie. In

1988, the institute signed a five-year contract with the Soviet copyright agency overseeing all translation agreements to publish English-language versions of 19 scientific journals, including the *Journal of Experimental and Theoretical Physics* (JETP), *JETP Letters* and *Uspekhi Fiz.* It required AIP to pay royalties, amounting to a little more than \$1 million annually, to be passed to authors.

However, that agency no longer exists and no successor has been formed. As a result, AIP is withholding its 1991 royalties cheque until "we can pay it in a way that will benefit the journals", says AIP's executive director, Kenneth Ford.

In the meantime, AIP has signed up six academy-owned journals and two published by independent institutes in Dubna and Kharkov, Ukraine, and hopes to reach agreements with six others that have expressed an interest in remaining with AIP. The contracts increase the size of its annual payments and include signing bonuses and advances against future royalties to help the Russian journals survive their present financial crisis. Although the academy intends its agreement with Pleiades to cover all its publications, there is a clause that permits journals "with a long history of working with foreign, nonprofit scientific publishers" to make their own agreements.

Evans estimates that "perhaps 100" of the more than 200 academy journals are commercially viable but that it is impossible to know how well any journal will do in Russia because a free market has never existed. "We can turn a profit with 60–70 subscribers", he says about journals with annual subscription prices ranging from \$600 to \$1,600. AIP says that its goal is to provide the English-speaking world with journals of high scientific quality as well as to be commercially successful. Both Evans and Ford say that international readers have gained from having Russian journals published by their organizations. Each cites faster publication times — in some cases, almost simultaneously with the Russian version — better translations and a more professional appearance.

The academy has been criticized for doing business with a company that also publishes an adult entertainment magazine. Evans says that there is no connection between Pleiades and *Penthouse* and that GMI's other businesses are irrelevant to the Russian venture. But Ford says that the Russian academy should not be doing business with GMI, which he says "is the publisher of trash", adding that he is "saddened that the academy found it necessary to enter into this relationship".

Vladimir Pokrowsky

ESA drops Hermes and turns towards links with Russia

Munich. Europe's beleaguered attempts to maintain an independent space programme in the face of recession moved forward last week when the European Space Agency (ESA) agreed to forge closer links with Russia while cutting back on its own projects. The agreement, expected to be approved at the ESA ministerial meeting in November, ends a period of doubt about Europe's ability to reach a consensus on space.

ESA's troubles started last year when Germany found itself unable to meet its financial contribution and other member states were unwilling to make up the shortfall. Since then, ESA has reconsidered its ambitious and increasingly expensive long-term plans, including participation in the launch of a manned space plane, Hermes, by the end of the century. The fate of the US\$7.5 billion Hermes programme hung in the balance until June, when its abandonment was recommended as part of a cost-saving package linked to plans to seek other partners (see *Nature* 357, 351; 1992).

Last week, ESA announced that negotiations between its member states had resulted in reductions of an additional ECU1 billion (US\$1.4 billion) from the 1993–2000 budget proposal, which now stands at ECU22 billion. Half of this saving will occur between 1993 and 1995, including ECU300 million saved by abandoning an unmanned demonstrator, known as X-2000, that was expected to attract international partners.

But ESA now believes that its future lies with the Russians. Jean-Jacques Dordain, counsellor to ESA's director general, says that negotiations with the cash-strapped Russians are no longer confined to the purchase of Russian hardware and the use of Russian facilities; both sides are seriously considering genuine joint ventures for developing space vehicles. But he says ESA will not put all its eggs in one basket. "We will still continue our own key technology work so that we can either share project development on equal terms with the Russians or — if the Russian deals fall through — we will still have the knowhow to develop an autonomous space vehicle."

The Germans, who have led the way in strengthening links with Russian space science, are convinced that cooperation is both achievable and productive. Last month they started a programme to save Russian space science during the next few uncertain years. Research minister Heinz Riesenhuber has pledged DM20 million (US\$15 million) a year, until 1996, to keep Russian space science and technology afloat while officials explore what Russia can offer.

Allison Abbott