

East Germany struggles to save its science academy

THE FUTURE of the East German Academy of Science, and of its 30 000 employees, could depend on the outcome of a meeting next week in Bonn. The academy faces financial trouble towards the end of this year when its current budget for science is exhausted (*This Week*, 7 April).

On 3 July, the ministers of research and technology from the two Germanys will meet with the presidents of the Max Planck Institute and the Fraunhofer Institute, and the heads of the East German Research Council. They will attempt to find a formula for overcoming the funding difficulties.

One rescue strategy under discussion is a moratorium that will allow the academy to suspend mounting expense payments for a two-year period. Proposed by Barbara Riedmüller, West Berlin's senator for science and technology, it has the support of the science ministry of East Germany and the West German scientific societies.

Although the moratorium would temporarily ensure the livelihoods of the 30 000 academy employees, a means of funding the operations of the academy during the moratorium has not yet emerged.

One source of funds may be the German Research Association (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), which has already been marshalled to the aid of East German science by the West German government. "Now, East German scientists may apply directly to the association for the financing of research," says Hubert Markl, the association's president.

Frank Terpe, East Germany's minister of research and technology, says that one of the first tasks to be faced is the decentralisation of the academy's institutes and their financ-

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ing. Some institutes, Terpe says, could become part of a framework of scientific institutions, dispersed through what will become East German federal states.

Another possibility under discussion is to return institutes to the stewardship of the universities from which they originated. Terpe adds that the delegates will evaluate the international importance of some of the institutes.

An inventory of performance would be taken by November 1991. If their productivity measured up to international standards, the East German institutes could be inte-

grated into the Max Planck or Fraunhofer institutes, or into organisations that are of similar rank.

The final paths Terpe mentioned concerned the development of the technological capabilities of East German industry. He suggested that some institutes could serve industry by setting themselves up as independent research enterprises. Individual scientists, says Terpe, could possibly find work at high technology firms.

Terpe also says that certain institutes were taking steps to ensure their own success. The East German Institute for Cybernetics and Information Processing is already looking at how to sell its products and services in the West. □