

International exchange

Hamburg forum a success — of a kind

"It was a success. All twenty speakers at the closing session agreed that it was a success. The fact that everyone stayed and there is a final statement is a sign of success".

Such was the summing up of the executive secretary, Dr Klaus Gottstein to *Nature*, when, after two weeks work and a marathon all-night session that ran on past the official closing date, the Hamburg Scientific Forum managed to hammer out a final statement that was more than diplomatic lip-service to peace and détente.

For in addition to noting that since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act there had been a "significant expansion of scientific cooperation . . . greater in some areas than in others", observing that "different levels of scientific development . . . should be taken into account when planning scientific cooperation", and laying the foundations for convening a further forum in the future, the final statement contained three proposals on subjects which had been the focus of controversy throughout: human rights, the international training of young scientists, and the freedom of scientific exchange and communications.

While there was no reference to Sakharov in the final statement — although the US delegate did raise the issue again in his closing address — the human rights issue did find a place there in general terms.

Increased scientific cooperation, said the statement, can only be achieved "by respect for all the principles and by full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Final Act. All participating states are therefore urged to observe the spirit and the letter of the Final Act, particularly with respect to the conditions essential for scientific cooperation.

"It is furthermore considered necessary to state that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms by all states represents one of the foundations for a significant improvement of these mutual relations and of international cooperation at all levels."

One subject which the Yugoslav delegate, Dr Drago Ocepek, had earlier associated with human rights was the international training of young scientists. Several delegates had endorsed this theme, including Dr Helge Gyllenberg of Finland and Dr J J Went of the Netherlands. This approach, however, is not popular with the Soviet Union, which tends to view visits abroad as a reward for achievement rather than a stimulus to further effort. Indeed, throughout the two weeks, the Soviet delegates had shown a marked reluctance to discuss any practical details of the logistics of exchange, claiming that the agenda should be confined to professional

discussions on the selected subjects — energy, urbanisation, food production and cancer, cardiovascular and virus diseases.

Nevertheless, international "training courses for young scientists . . . that would enable them to study new science and methods for shorter or longer periods" found a place in the final statement, with the recommendation that "information about these facilities . . . should be disseminated as widely as possible".

The other major barrier to international exchange — restrictions on the free circulation of scientists and information had also produced vigorous confrontations. There were the routine complaints about Soviet scientists who fail to arrive at conferences where they are scheduled to speak — countered,

somewhat irrelevantly, by an accusation from the Soviet Union that in 1976 the University of Geneva had refused to let an Iranian "assistant" in the law department deliver lectures in Marxism. Full freedom of exchange, said the Soviet and East German delegates, was only possible in conditions of complete disarmament.

From the Danish delegation, Dr Maaloe had described the work of the ICSU Committee on the Safeguard of the Pursuit of Science, and stressed the scientific and economic losses caused by unnecessary secrecy. All this was condensed in the final statement to a clause urging "equitable opportunities for scientific research and for wider communications and travel necessary for professional purposes".

Vera Rich

US academy suspends exchanges with Soviet Union

THE council of the National Academy of Sciences has voted to suspend for a period of six months all bilateral symposia, seminars, workshops and new initiatives with the Soviet Academy of Sciences, in protest at the internal exile from Moscow of physicist Dr Andrei Sakharov.

The first meeting to be affected by the academy's decision will be a conference on the interactions between laser beams and matter which was to have taken place at the University of Arizona in early March, and to which 20 Americans and 15 Soviet scientists had been invited.

Three other meetings over the next six months will also be affected, including meetings between scientists from both sides

on basic research, on physics and on experimental psychology. However the council has stressed that its decision is not meant to affect individual contact between US and Soviet scientists, which it says "are matters properly left to the consciences of the participating individuals".

The academy's decision was agreed by a vote of 10 to 3, although some of those who voted against are thought to have pushed for firmer measures, such as extending the suspension of exchanges to one year.

In a telegram sent after the council's meeting to Academician A P Aleksandrov, President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Dr Saunders Maclane, Vice-President and acting chairman of the NAS council expresses "our profound hope that the safety and freedom of movement of academician Andrei D Sakharov and his family will be protected".

Dr Maclane also says that the policy adopted by the council — which has been organising exchanges with the Soviet Union for 21 years — reflects the strongly held views of many US scientists. "Our council hopes that the circumstances that have led to the adoption of that policy will soon change so as to permit restoration of the full exchange programme which we have, until recently, viewed with great satisfaction".

The council adds that it sees "no long term national benefit in modifying scientific exchanges to every political action and reaction", but that it is taking action following repeated requests from its members. Dr Sakharov was made a foreign associate of the academy in 1973.

David Dickson

