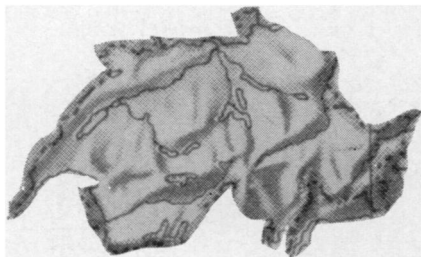


LETTER FROM GENEVA



Low-key confabs

The U.N.'s European commission is easing toward science cooperation

by Howard Schwartz

Except for the periodic crises that reach the level of the Security Council, most of the activities of the United Nations go on seemingly supremely unaffected by events or international conflicts.

A good example is the work of the U.N.'s Economic Commission for Europe, which is quietly pushing scientific and technological cooperation on the international level.

Without regard to the upheaval caused by the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia, the commission recently sponsored the first meeting of governmental science specialists from all ECE countries, including both Czechoslovakia and the U.S.S.R., and laid plans for international cooperation on the problem of adapting new technology to local needs.

The ECE is one of four regional economic commissions set up by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. All the European countries, plus the United States, are members.

The opening move came last spring, when the commission adopted a formal resolution calling for the early convening of a meeting of "governmental experts from member countries, qualified to deal with scientific and technological policy, to study the possibilities of expanding scientific and technological cooperation. . . ."

The resolution, which had been sponsored energetically by delegates from a broad group of European Governments, including the U.S.S.R. and a number of European Common Market countries, specified that the task of the governmental experts would be to recommend studies on methods of scientific policy, the compilation of comparable statistics on research potential, the definition of criteria and objectives for scientific and technological cooperation and the evaluation of means to be applied to that end.

The five-day closed meeting of experts, held in late January at the European Office of the United Nations in Geneva, marked the first time that governmental experts from all ECE countries had assembled in one room to look into the scientific and technological questions. They came out with some steps toward answers, at least.

The first project recommended by the meeting, is a study on criteria, institutions and policy for the effective application of science and technology in industry. To be carried out in conjunction with UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Or-

ganization in Paris—and the senior economic advisers to ECE member governments, the proposed study will give particular emphasis to the role of research in economic development.

It is envisaged that the study, perhaps supplemented by reports submitted by individual governments, could be discussed at a seminar to be convened in 1971, after the conference of ministers of science of the European member states of UNESCO. The seminar could also consider the related subject matter of elaborating economic models for long-term projections integrating research and development factors. No such models are as yet available. The unsolved problem consists of linking medium-term scientific and technological policies to long-term economic and social objectives.

Other priority projects recommended by the experts are:

- A comparative examination of various national methods of long-term technological planning, including methods of forecasting possible or probable technological developments and systems analysis and operational research applicable to economic objectives.

- A register of existing typical bilateral and multilateral governmental agreements for the transfer of technology, and an analysis of the results of, and problems and obstacles encountered in, the implementation of such agreements, to be followed by the consideration of means to overcome these obstacles.

- Studies of the transfer of technology and factors accounting for different technological levels among European member countries, including the degree of capacity to absorb new technologies, the comparative cost and size of market, as well as problems related to management.

- A study, in liaison with UNESCO, of the major national and international information systems, and of criteria for optimal structure of information systems in specific fields, emphasizing advantages and disadvantages, costs versus benefits to be derived and the access and utility of the systems to users.

- Cooperation in research in the field of management efficiency and operational research.

The next step before the proposed projects can actually get off the ground is for the recommendation to be approved formally by the commission, at its 24th annual meeting in April 1969. Once this approval is given, ECE staff can go to work on the new projects.