Eckart von Braun IGCP Secretary Retires

The end of an era for the International Geological Correlation Programme (IGCP) came this year with the retirement of its Secretary, Eckart von Braun. He headed the IGCP Secretariat in Paris from 1974, the year after the joint IUGS-Unesco program was launched. He played a pivotal role in nurturing its growth into what is probably the most diverse and successful multi-national research programs in the earth sciences today.

Under the IGCP umbrella, there are now more than 50 individual projects led by geoscientists from 28 countries and working on topics ranging from phosphorites to the Phanerozoic time scale, from the Cretaceous of Latin America to the metallogeny of ophiolites, and from Proterozoic geochemistry to rare events in geology. IGCP maintains its dynamism partly through an annual "turnover" of projects, with some completing their work and others being newly approved. The output in terms of publications has been nothing short of phenomenal. The first IGCP Catalogue for the period 1973 to 1979 cites 4,737 publications arising wholly or in part from IGCP projects, and the second list for 1978 to 1982 includes 14,359 titles! All this is accomplished with a budget that is currently no more than US \$340,000. IGCP's stellar status owes a great deal to Eckart von Braun who shaped it into its current form.

Like many a good geoscience manager, Dr. von Braun has a solid background in geology and exploration. Born in Silesia, in the Federal Republic of Germany, he had from childhood a lively interest in nature. As he says "my father often admonished me to lift my nose from the ground when we went hiking in my native Riesengebirge - in vain as it seems!" In 1946, a brief stint as a driller on an oil rig near Hamburg convinced the young von Braun to become a geologist. Studies at the Universities of Mainz (F.R.G.) and Basel (Switzerland) culminated in his doctorate degree in 1953 after a thesis on the stratigraphy and sedimentology of part of the Swiss-German molasse basin.

Dr. von Braun's first job after graduation was with a German petroleum exploration project in eastern Greece, an area whose "so called basement" he still hopes "to knock at again." Then after a brief training in photogeology at the Institut Français du Pétrole, he joined Texas Gulf Sulphur exploring for sulphur in Sicily, Turkey and F.R.G. and for nuclear raw materials in Ethiopia. During these years he was fascinated by the wide range of geology he saw but sometimes felt frustrated because he was "not entitled to dig deep and long enough into an attractive problem." As a result, in 1958 he joined the German Geological Survey (now Bundesanstalt für Geowissenschaften und Rohstoffe - BGR) with initial assignments in mapping and uranium exploration in Lower Saxony, followed by a comprehensive review of the uranium potential of the whole Federal Republic of Germany.

In 1961 Dr. von Braun joined a uranium prospecting mission in the Peruvian Andes, and from 1965 to 1971 he was a member of the German Geological Mission mapping northern

Thailand with a view to tin, tungsten, lead and fluorspar exploration. After returning from Thailand in 1971, he continued his involvement in international cooperation as Chief of the federal and international map production units of the BGR, handling German inputs to the international geological and hydrogeological maps of Europe, for example.

When Dr. von Braun came to the IGCP headquarters of Unesco in Paris in late 1974 he found "a ready-made structure though somewhat abandoned because (the late) Felix Ronner, the first IGCP Secretary, had already left six months or so earlier. But with some guidance from colleagues and with an indefatigable secretary, we managed to keep the boat afloat. In the following years, IGCP sailed against some stiff breezes internally be-

cause of competition from other programs for money and manpower. This explains partly why such programs as IHP, MAB, and IOC are run by elaborate machines, whereas IGCP could be content with a minimum of staff." However, he acknowledges that an important ingredient has always been the "efficient help" provided by successive IUGS officials, and this has helped to secure the praise often received by IGCP for its "leanness and relative cost-efficiency."

One lesson, according to Dr. von Braun, "is that for making an impact on the field of science, Unesco invariably needs the scientific unions. One of the main reasons for the success of IGCP appears to be the way projects are adopted. They are proposed and formulated from below, from where the work is to be done. By leaving the choice of subject, collaborators and approach almost entirely to project proposers and leaders, there are only genuine motivated people assembled in IGCP, particularly after the proposals have been pruned in peer review by scientific committee and board."

"Of course" he says, "IGCP therefore looks somewhat patchy, less organized than other comparable programs. But this is a low price for getting unconditional commitment and voluntary action on the project level. For a handful of dollars spent on meetings, IGCP claims parenthood of an amazingly varied choice of scientific research, often of 'cutting edge' quality. Thus IGCP provides yet another example of what motivated scientists are able to achieve through international cooperation, providing political interferences are kept to a minimum."

As to the future of IGCP, Eckart von Braun finds this "hard to tell, since Unesco seems likely to undergo some sort of metabolism in the not too distant future. If Unesco tries to run IGCP on its own, which I doubt, the program would lose much of its standing among most geoscientists. If IUGS were to 'play it solo,' a number of adherents, particularly from government institutions, might find it difficult to remain in the program. Besides, Unesco money, small though it may seem, is making the difference for many who could not otherwise join. IGCP shares a serious problem with many other scientific endeavours: the need to translate scientific achievement into a language yielding active public approval. The next interim report will be a step in the right direction, I am convinced."

A few months ago Dr. von Braun returned to the BGR to "do more geology and less riding on paper tigers." He can do so content in the knowledge that IGCP thrives today largely because of his dedication, diplomacy and hard work. □