Pierre and Marie Curie University (University of Paris VI) and a member of CNRS's science council, she'll also work to "restore direct funding and decision-making power to the individual laboratories."

Bréchignac's affiliation with CNRS goes back more than 25 years, to when she began her career using laser spectroscopy to study collisions between atoms and radioactive isotopes at the organization's Aimé Cotton Laboratory in Orsay. She later switched research topics and in 1981 started a group in atomic aggregates. She served as director of Aimé Cotton from 1989 to 1995, when she became director of CNRS's physical and mathematical sciences department. "The choice of Catherine Bréchignac is certainly a good one," says Hubert Curien, a retired solid-state physicist who served as minister of research and technology in four previous socialist governments. "She is bright in her judgments and her decisions."

TONI FEDER

A Physicist, Rexhep Mejdani, Now Leads Albania

On July 25, the People's Assembly of Albania elected physicist Rexhep Mejdani to be the country's next president, following general elections at the end of June in which the Socialist Party overwhelmingly defeated the incumbent Democratic Party. Mejdani will serve a five-year term, sharing governing responsibilities with the new prime minister, Fatos Nano.

Since February, the troubled Balkan nation has experienced what some describe as a "meltdown," triggered by the collapse of pyramid investment schemes, which wiped out an estimated $1.2 billion of Albanians' personal savings, and fed by street violence, looting and mob activity. Restoring stability will be a difficult task, and Mejdani has said he intends to pursue a course dedicated to "national reconciliation."

A professor of physics at the University of Tirana when he was elected, Mejdani has more international ties than the average Albanian. He holds a 1984 PhD in physics from the University of Paris South and has been a frequent visitor to the International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy. In addition, he served on the council of the European Physical Society and has been vice president of the Albanian Physical Society since its founding in 1991. Mejdani's research in condensed matter theory has focused on disordered crystals.

The new president's entry into politics is a recent one. He joined the Socialist Party in early 1996 and shortly afterward was named secretary general, the party's second highest post. Prior to that, he served as chairman of the election commission during the country's first democratic elections in 1991. Robert Papa, an officer at the Albanian embassy in Washington, DC, expressed concern over the Socialist Party's ties to the old Communist regime, but said that Mejdani "looks more moderate than the others [in his party]."

It remains to be seen what, if anything, Mejdani's election means for the scientific community. Agim Minxhozi, president of the Albanian Physical Society and a researcher at the Institute of Nuclear Physics in Tirana, described the current status of physics in his country as "very, very poor. We have a problem just of survival sometimes. We have lost many young promising people who have emigrated." Political instability has made it impossible to set a long-term strategy for research, he said, which in turn has hampered requests for funding from foreign agencies.

Minxhozi said he had a "friendly" conversation with Mejdani after the election and hopes the president will indeed support science. Although Mejdani's recent interests have been more political than scientific, "I still believe that he is our friend," Minxhozi said. "But in this country, we have many problems, small ones, big ones. I am not sure how it will evolve."

JEAN KUMAGAI

Board Grants Massachusetts Physics Programs a Reprieve

Physics programs in the Massachusetts state college system will be reviewed externally, not automatically phased out, the state's Board of Higher Education decided in June.

The system's 3 physics programs—in Bridgewater, North Adams and Worcester—were among the more than 40 programs singled out last fall for possible closure because they produce fewer than five graduates annually (see PHYSICS TODAY, June, page 74); 26 of them will be closed immediately.

Bonnie Kind, Worcester State College's vice president for academic affairs, and others credit the arguments given by two state college presidents at a board hearing for persuading the board to override a recommendation by the state's chancellor of higher education to cut the physics programs. "One thing that was persuasive was the issue of not denying students access to physics in the system as a whole," Kind says. The external review, which will be conducted over the next academic year, will be used to help the board reach a "final determination whether to consolidate, discontinue or transfer" the programs.

Although faculty and administrators are pleased about the reprieve for physics programs, the threat of closure still looms. "Many of us feel that [the board has] only placated us for a year, but still intends to eliminate the programs" if the five-graduates-per-year quota is not met, says Ann Lydecker, provost and academic vice president of Bridgewater State College. "It's probationary and we're still worried," agrees Bridgewater physics chair George Weygand. "But at least we have a chance. I'm confident we'll be successful in justifying our existence."

TONI FEDER

IN BRIEF

In June physical chemist Kurt Komarek began a three-year term as chair of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis's governing council. Founded 25 years ago, the Laxenburg, Austria–based IIASA supports policy-oriented research on global environmental issues. It has 16 national member organizations in Europe, North America and Asia. Komarek, a member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and until recently a member of the University of Vienna's chemistry faculty, has served on IIASA's council since 1991. As council chair, Komarek succeeds Russian theoretical physicist Gueorgui S. Golitsyn.

FRANZ NEBUDA, IIASA

KURT KOMAREK

The *Directory of Physics, Astronomy and Geophysics Staff* for 1996–97 is now available. Published by the American Institute of Physics, the directory provides contact information for approximately 30 000 scientists in academe, government, industry, hospitals and other types of institutions in the US and Canada. Copies may be obtained for $65 each (or $52 for members of AIP member societies or Corporate Associates; American Physical Society members will receive a complimentary copy) by writing to the Ameri-