EEC in disarray after split over treaty conference

BY QUENTIN PEEL

THE EUROPEAN Community was yesterday left in public disarray by the split among the heads of government at their summit in Milan over whether to hold a conference to amend the founding Treaty of Rome.

Plans for the conference remained in doubt yesterday after a stormy meeting which left Britain in a minority of three with Denmark and Greece. Despite the majority decision to proceed with a full conference, neither the mandate to hold one nor the attendance of member-states was agreed.

Denmark, in particular, was threatening to stay away. Mr Poul Schluter, the Danish Prime Minister, made clear after the meeting that he would not agree to any formal amendment of the Treaty of Rome, which would have to be unanimously approved by all 10 member states.

He said his Government would decide whether to attend the conference, planned to be convened before the end of October, only when he saw what arrangements would be proposed by the EEC foreign ministers.

Moreover, Luxembourg, which today takes over the presidency of the Council of Ministers, will have to launch attempts to patch up the differences between the member states ahead of the foreign ministers' meeting later this month.

The foreign ministers will also have to take the formal decision to proceed with any conference only after the European Parliament has been consulted at its July session.

In London, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, will make a full statement to the House of Commons tomorrow. The opposition parties will seek to criticise her and the Foreign Office about what they see as the embarrassing mishandling of the talks. Most Conservative MPs, however, are likely to express strong support for the stand she took over treaty amendments.

Dr David Owen, the SDP leader, last night accused Mrs Thatcher of wielding a blunderbuss in her dealings with her European partners when what Britain and Europe needed was a rapier. She had, he said, demonstrated a lack of political finesse.

The confrontation, precipitated by Sig Bettino Craxi, the Italian Prime Minister, when he called for an unprecedented informal vote on the question, effectively prevented any further immediate action being taken to speed up the decision-making process of the Community.

The dispute over the institutional questions overshadowed agreement by the heads of government on a set

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After the EEC summit

Why it all went wrong

By Quentin Peel in Milan

EVEN in the annals of the European Community, there can scarcely have been an occasion when appearances were more divorced from reality. As fireworks in the green and white of the European federalist movement burst over the medieval Castello Sterpsense in Milan, on Saturday night, and champagne corks popped in the courtyard, the leaders of the EEC were licking their wounds after a bruising two-day summit which left them deeply and publicly divided on questions of fundamental principle.

Signor Bettino Craxi, the Italian Prime Minister, and host of what was billed as the launch pad for a decisive move towards European Union, announced that his country was breaking up. The British delegation by surprise, a host of what was a great event, voted 7-3. The British probably agree on more formal consultation with the European Parliament.

The British plan failed at Milan for a variety of reasons. In the first place, with memories of the Budget deal still vivid, it aroused a general suspicion among the EEC partners that Mrs Thatcher might get away again with picking the bits of the Community she wanted, without making any concessions to other nations' priorities. Thus came the virulent opposition to the Treaty of Rome remained, in differing ways that there was a clearcut, not only of the Committee of Ministers, but a separate agreement on the basis of co-ordination.