

Closer collaboration on high-tech endorsed

BY ALAN FRIEDMAN IN MILAN

THE Milan summit gave its stamp of approval to the idea of a collective effort on Europe-wide technological co-operation. In particular it endorsed the French Eureka initiative for creating a technological Europe which would co-ordinate research and product application in the high technology field.

At the conclusion of the summit on Saturday night it was agreed that a ministerial-level meeting should be convened in Paris before July 14 to form an ad hoc committee which will study how to finance the Eureka programme. Research and science ministers from the 10 member states of the Community, new members Spain and Portugal and non-members such as Austria, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland are expected to attend the meeting and form the committee.

One idea discussed in Milan and seen as a serious prospect would be funding the technological co-ordination through the European Investment Bank (EIB).

Although M Jacques Delors, president of the European Commission, has been a fervent advocate of technology co-operation, President Francois Mitterrand on Saturday was firmly resisting the idea of too much Commission involvement in Eureka. One French official explained: "We don't want the Commission to get its hands on this and create a bureaucracy which will frighten everyone away."

This French determination to keep the management of Eureka

Forty-seven measures aimed at making the EEC more relevant to its 227m citizens won the approval of the summit leaders, Ivo Dawney writes from Milan.

The report of the so-called People's Europe Committee, chaired by Sig Pietro Adonino, will now be up to the Commission and member states to implement. The heads of government have ordered the preparation of a progress report for the next summit in Luxembourg in December.

away from the European Commission fits in with the British view of strong support for Eureka as long as it does not create an unwieldy bureaucracy and entail heavy government contribution.

The French view is that the EIB, industry, universities and other private sector organisations should contribute to the funding of Eureka projects, which would focus primarily on the commercial exploitation of high technology products.

British Prime Minister Mrs Margaret Thatcher came to Milan armed with a proposal to create a "Euro-type product warrant" — a registration scheme open to European manufacturers of high technology products who can demonstrate that the product in question is being developed in collaboration with a company from at least one other European country.

People's Europe was an idea born at the Fontainebleau summit last year, when President Francois Mitterrand called for strenuous efforts to make the European ideal a more vivid everyday reality.

The committee's proposals include such ideas as educational exchanges, wider diffusion of television programmes, European work camps, cheap museums and more practical ideas such as an EEC driving licence and integrated rates for postal charges.

Once a product has been patented as a Euro-type product, a brief description and specification would be circulated to other European manufacturers, who in turn would then have the option to contact the originating manufacturers and offer to participate in the research and development, production and marketing of the product.

The chief benefit for the manufacturer of a Euro-type product would be the Europe-wide acceptance of the warrant as a domestic product for all purposes, especially in public sector procurement by Community member states or by non-members who are part of the agreement.

The British proposal, likely to be discussed at the ministerial meeting this month even contains a specific suggestion as to how Euro-type product warrants could be administered:



Thatcher: backs Euro-type product

the European Patent Office in Munich, assisted by a small team of independent industrial consultants, would be asked to judge the eligibility of products based on agreed criteria.

While the scope of Eureka and a technological Europe remains vague, a Community consensus appears to be forming that a joint technological effort should be tied closely to other common policies, in particular the effort to unify the internal market and in trade. Heads of government meeting in Milan said a key goal was to reduce the risk of unnecessary duplication of national efforts in the high technology field.

For example, a British official pointed out that Europe produces no fewer than nine digital switching systems for a market which could support perhaps two or three at best.