

Europe Pushes Ahead with Plans for Joint Projects

More than 60 new collaborative studies in science and technology are anticipated among 19 countries

LONDON
EUREKA is proving to be the right idea at the right time," Geoffrey Pattie, Britain's information technology minister, told a meeting of businessmen here 2 weeks ago. He was referring to the momentum that continues to grow behind the initiative launched last year by French President François Mitterrand to persuade European nations to collaborate on a range of research and research and development projects on advanced technology.

On 30 June, the research ministers of 19 European countries confirmed this judgment. Meeting under Pattie's chairmanship, they approved a list of 62 new projects, ranging from plans for research on an "intelligent car" to a joint research program on the transport of chemical pollutants in the atmosphere, to be carried out by companies grouped together under the EUREKA label.

Their agreement to the new projects considerably enlarges a preliminary list of ten projects which was agreed to at a previous ministerial meeting last November. Equally significant, the research ministers agreed that a secretariat be established in Brussels to act as an information clearinghouse.

The secretariat will be headed by a Frenchman, Xavier Fels, a former economic attaché in the French Embassy in Washington who is currently the counselor for international affairs in France's directorate-general for telecommunications.

Although widely quoted as the European response to the Strategic Defense Initiative, EUREKA is being increasingly seen in broader terms. Many politicians now recognize it as an important strategy through which Europe's high technology companies can join together to compete with the United States and Japan in international markets.

In particular, it is seen as a way of extending a growing number of collaborative "pre-competitive research" programs, such as the information technology scheme ESPRIT launched 3 years ago by the Commission of the European Economic Community in Brussels, into the more market-oriented do-

main of "competitive research". The purpose is to help groups of two or more European companies link together to work on the development of common products.

The shift from topic-oriented to product-oriented research, together with a general agreement that the main source of funding for EUREKA projects will be the private sector, has helped to turn Britain from an initial skeptic into one of the scheme's most enthusiastic supporters. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, for example, in an address at the London meeting, said that if efforts to promote collaboration failed "we face the stark prospect that the United States and Japan will monopolize world markets in high technology goods."

Although Britain has not allocated any extra funding for research projects awarded the EUREKA label, it agreed last fall to make funds available under an existing scheme run by the Department of Trade and Industry for supporting new innovations. British companies are now participating in 30 out of the 72 projects which have been agreed to so far.

West Germany is also making enthusiastic noises about EUREKA. The German minister for research and technology, Heinz Riesenhuber, agreed to make over \$200 million available over the next 10 years, and that as a result the number of projects including German companies would increase from four to 19.

Almost half of the government's contribution, he added, would go toward three multinational research ventures on environmental topics, including studies of the transport of chemical pollutants in the atmosphere (considered essential for tackling the problem of Germany's dying forests), and the ecological balance in the North Sea.

Ironically, it is now France whose support for EUREKA, after the change of government in March, is the most ambiguous among major European nations. Officially, France remains a strong supporter, and French companies are participating in almost 50 of the approved projects.

In practice, however, its support has cooled since last year, with unconfirmed

reports that it plans to cut back on the large contribution from public funds promised by the previous government.

France's uncertainty also reflects continued ambiguity about the relationship between EUREKA and the SDI research program. The previous government admitted that although EUREKA was a neutral research program, it was likely to have significant spin-offs for military technologies. Its successor has made it clear that it does not share Mitterrand's antagonism toward SDI, indeed that it is keen for French companies to participate, while Prime Minister Jacques Chirac has in the past criticized EUREKA as "not being the appropriate response."

Britain and Germany, however, claim that they see no conflict or even competition between the two research programs. Both have signed formal agreements with the United States covering the terms of participation of government, industry, and university scientists in SDI research—and both are keen that EUREKA, in contrast to SDI, be clearly seen as a civilian program. But the distinction remains vague.

There are many enthusiasts, particularly among those who share Mitterrand's vision of Europe united through technological cooperation. Glyn Ford, for example, a member of the European Parliament Energy and Research Committee who has just completed a report adopted by the committee on EUREKA, claims its main fault to be not going far enough toward meeting the challenge from the United States and Japan.

"The figures are derisively small," says Ford in his report. "Even on the most optimistic assessment, the EUREKA budget would amount to only a fraction of the annual R&D spending of General Motors [\$3 billion] or IBM [\$2 billion]."

There are other, less sympathetic, complaints. Protests continue to be heard from left-wing parties such as the German Greens that the list of technologies endorsed so far goes too far toward the emergence of a new military industrial complex based on SDI-type technology.

From the other end of the political spectrum, many private companies remain suspicious of any government efforts to promote strategic technologies—apart from those with defense applications, where the military is acknowledged to be the prime customer.

The consensus reached by the research ministers in London on Monday therefore remains fragile. The test will come at the next ministerial meeting in 6 months, to see whether it can be held together sufficiently firmly for some genuine achievements to emerge. ■ DAVID DICKSON