

## OLD WORLD

# European Space Agency by 1974

EUROPE is to have its own space agency by 1974. At a meeting of the European Space Conference in Brussels last week the twelve ministers of the member states agreed that a new organization, to be known as the European Space Agency, should be formed out of the European Launcher Development Organization and the European Space Research Organization, if possible in 1974.

After a lengthy meeting, the start of which was delayed when Mr Michael Heseltine, Minister for Aerospace and Shipping, was held up by fog, the European ministers emerged with a framework which they believe will give Europe a real chance to make progress in space. The conference agreed that the agency's aim will be to integrate the national space programmes in a single European space programme, "as far and as fast as is reasonably possible", and the conference also gave general approval for the post-Apollo sortie laboratory project and the French launcher plans (see *Nature*, 240, 434; 1972) to be carried out and managed within a common European framework. But the conference put aside the questions of who is to participate in these projects and who is to finance them. Discussion of these will come later. Mr Heseltine made it plain, however, that Britain's attitude to a European launcher has not changed. Britain is still happy with assurances from the United States that launchers will be made available and still sees the creation of a European launcher as an unnecessary effort. Britain, therefore, will not be contributing to the launcher, although it emerged at the conference that West Germany may be interested in the new French proposals which involve the scrapping of Europa III. The ESC also agreed that there should be a rationalization of the various satellite programmes that Europe is currently financing, including the GTS programme, on the understanding that the agreement made by ESRO in 1971 is not being questioned. This agreement includes plans for a prototype telecommunications satellite to be put into orbit by a launcher obtained from the United States.

The hard details of the agency have still to be worked out, but the principle is clearly established that financial contributions to its work will be based upon each country deciding which projects it wants to support and not upon a levy based on the gross national product of each country—the traditional

way of funding international agencies.

It is not intended that all national programmes will be immediately handed over to the agency, but that programmes should gradually be phased in over the years. Not all Britain's space activities will be affected. British commitments to Intelsat and the Ministry of Defence's Skynet project will not be involved.

Before going to Brussels, Mr Heseltine gave evidence to the Select Committee on Science and Technology and gave the government's answer to the committee's proposals in its fifth report (published in November 1971) that Britain should create a National Space Agency. Mr Heseltine explained that if a European agency was formed following the Brussels meeting a British agency would be outmoded.

Discussing the financing of Britain's space programme Mr Heseltine said

### ENERGY

## Future of Coal

HARD on the heels of the government's decision to wipe off £475 million of the National Coal Board's debt (*Nature*, 240, 431; 1972), the British coal industry has come out with a document which argues that coal is an indispensable part of any future European energy plan.

In a remarkable display of unity, Mr Derek Ezra, chairman of the NCB, Mr Joe Gormley, president of the National Union of Miners, and representatives of other branches of the coal industry last week wholeheartedly supported the report, *Coal and Energy Policy in Europe*, which calls for coal to be used to "its full and effective potential" within the European Community.

Britain's entry into the EEC next week will increase the community's coal output from 170 million to 300 million tons, and the NCB in particular sees this as an appropriate time to try to increase Britain's coal exports to Europe from the present level of 3 million tons to 5 million.

But the nub of the report lies in the calculations of the combined future energy requirements of the initial six members of the EEC and Britain (see table). The balance between energy needs and energy supply has to be filled with coal or imported oil and "in view of all the difficulties envisaged for oil we consider that as large a part of this market as possible should be supplied with coal", says the report.

The report suggests that an energy

that "it is my specific view that we are not going to increase our spending on space". A European agency would only rationalize the current expenditure of the European nations and prevent needless duplication. "I am sure", he said, "that Europe will be brought together in time by economic pressures and in my view the sooner the better".

At the start of the European Space Conference, Mr Théo Lefevre, the Belgian Science Minister and chairman of the conference, appealed for some measure of unity in space policy. Europe, he said, had just six months to decide a course of action, the implication being that the United States is not prepared to wait any longer than that for a reply to its invitation to Europe to participate in the post-Apollo programme by building the sortie laboratory.

policy for the enlarged EEC should be based on the following points. First, that oil from the North Sea should be used to displace imported oil rather than other indigenous energy sources. Second, that natural gas should be conserved by restricting its use for premium purposes. Third, that nuclear power should be developed at the most economic rate, keeping its long-term potential in mind.

While entry to the EEC provides opportunities to the British coal industry, there is also the fear that entry will provide a gateway for coal which is at present being imported into the EEC from outside countries, usually with the help of massive subsidies from the governments concerned, to be sold in Britain at a lower cost than British coal. This coal is imported now under a quota system, and Mr Ezra said last week that once Britain was in the EEC he would try to get the community's policy on coal imports reviewed.

Combined Primary Energy Requirements of the Six and Britain

	Million tonnes coal equivalent		
	1970	1980 (est.)	1985 (est.)
Natural gas	89	285	355
North Sea oil (incl. Norway)	—	170	340
Lignite	33	38	37
Nuclear power	13	105	235
Hydro electricity	47	48	49
	182	646	1,016
Balance (coal and imported oil)	992	1,179	1,254
Total	1,174	1,825	2,270