Anglo-French cooperation

Technology dominates summit

AFTER the bitter battles over British contributions to the European Community budget and almost every other kind of acrimony between France and Britain, the British Prime Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, and the French President, M. François Mitterrand, last week made up their differences at a meeting in Paris at which agreements on technology and research played an unusually prominent role.

M. Mitterrand was the cooler of the two. He spoke on Friday of "an excellent spirit of cooperation". Mrs Thatcher, more fulsome, spoke of "a completely new atmosphere... it is just a totally different bilateral from any we have had before... more constructive, more cooperative". With the budget issue out of the way, she wanted to suggest, real Franco-British cooperation can begin.

Technology came up as the list of major projects on which Britain and France have either agreed in the past 12 months or hope soon to agree. The highlight was the Channel Tunnel, or "fixed Channel link" as it is called in France to include the possibilities of both tunnel and bridge.

The two governments, no doubt aware that the tunnel was first suggested in 1751, emphasized the "urgency" of the studies now under way that will identify the political structures under which the "link" can go ahead. Both sides have agreed that the link must be paid for by private funds, but potential backers have asked for guarantees that construction will not be halted for political reasons.

The tunnel apart, the Franco-British summit raised the following issues:

- Esprit, the European cooperative research programme on information technology, which is felt greatly to have improved bilateral links between French and British companies.

- Fast reactor development, where outline agreements among European utilities, research organizations and fuel-cycle companies were reached this year following a political umbrella agreement in January. (But details of exactly who does what and where have still to be agreed.)

- The Versailles summit programme, under which "quite fruitful" Franco-British work is going on in biotechnology and food technology.

- A Chinese pressurized water reactor for Guangdong, under development jointly by Framatome of France and General Electric Company of Britain. "We hope, both of us, to get substantial orders for that power station", said Mrs Thatcher last Friday.

- Direct broadcast satellite (DBS) transmission standards, where bilateral discussions are well advanced to avoid the dual standards (PAL and SECAM) that have plagued the European domestic television market.

- The European A320 Airbus, on which Britain is to collaborate more fully than on the earlier A300 and A310 versions, it is claimed in Paris.

- A military helicopter engine (RTM 322) under joint development between Rolls-Royce and Turbomeca, a third-generation antitank weapon (with Germany) and a multi-launch rocket system (also with Germany).

Telecommunications and space projects were also mentioned, although progress in

opening the British telecommunications market to the French (and vice versa) has not gone as fast as the French would have liked, and space agreements must wait for the European space summit in Rome next January.

The meeting also postponed until next year a Franco-British "association" for discussing the exchange of results between universities and industry (see *Nature* 1 November, p.4) which will be debated at a bilateral meeting in February. Meanwhile, soundings are taking place to determine exactly what each side would like to get out of such an institution, and how it would work in practice.

Robert Walgate

Polish science budget

Paper generosity decreed

Warsaw

POLAND'S science budget, at present one of the lowest in Europe in relation to national income, is to be substantially increased. Last week, the academic secretary of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Dr Zdzisław Kaczmarek, told the presidium of the academy that next year the government would increase the academy's "science" budget by 26 per cent, and that financial support for the academy would be further strengthened by an allocation of 1,000 million zloty from the central technical economic fund. This, said Dr Kaczmarek, would allow more money to be allotted to research. Wages within the academy network, moreover, would be increased, on the average, to 10 per cent above the national mean, rising to 30 per cent above the national mean in the next three years.

Dr Kaczmarek's announcement has been received with a mixture of relief and

scepticism. Poland at present spends only 2.5 per cent of the national income on science (including the university and industrial research sectors), and any increase is clearly welcome. Many scientists, however, feel considerable doubt as to whether the wage rises can be as substantial as promised. One researcher said that her own monthly salary, 7,000 zloty, is not only far below the national average of 17,000 zloty, but well below the salary of those doing similar work in the universities.

There is also some scepticism about the new "Committee for Matters of Science and Technical Progress", which is intended to have responsibility for research areas of science of particular importance for the national economy. Many of the older generation of scientists see it as a return to a similar body of the 1960s, when the academy's powers were considerably less than at present.

Vera Rich

No cancer cure

Washington

A BATTLE is in prospect between the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) over whether the government should throw the book at the Kellogg cereal company for its advertising campaign that promotes All-Bran cereal as a cancer preventive.

Kellogg's television and print advertisements running since the beginning of October state that "the National Cancer Institute [NCI] believes a high fiber, low fat diet may reduce your risk of some kinds of cancer", and then proceed to extol the virtues of All-Bran's high-fibre content. The print advertisements also tell readers how they can obtain additional cancer prevention information from NCI.

NCI officials, who have made diet modification a key component of their plans to cut cancer mortality by half by the year 2000, appear to support Kellogg's efforts; they particularly seem to like an offer by Kellogg to turn over to NCI the backs of their cereal boxes for additional

cancer-prevention messages. In a report to Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler, Assistant Secretary for Health Edward Brandt noted that "this effort by the Kellogg Company will infuse millions of dollars of private sector funds into the promotion of cancer prevention".

But FDA meanwhile has been looking

into the possibility that the Kellogg advertisements violate federal law. While avoiding direct comment on the Kellogg case, Mark Novitch, deputy commissioner of food and drugs, recently told a food industry meeting in Washington that "current FDA rules prohibit any labelling [on foods] that makes health claims".

Stephen Budiansky