

## Congress of Paris an anticlimax

This week's diplomatic gathering at Paris has formally confirmed that the Cold War is over, but the future of Europe remains in doubt.

THIS time last year, there was every reason to expect that the gathering of the world's great and good this week in Paris would be a turning point in affairs as significant as the Congress of Vienna which marked the ending of the Napoleonic wars and settled the balance of power in Europe until the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. But this year's meeting has turned out differently from that of 1815, and has been an anticlimax. Not that its achievements are negligible. There is, indeed, a treaty on conventional arms in Europe, which has indeed been signed. And the 32 governments represented in Paris have agreed to build on the Helsinki agreements, first negotiated in 1978, which offers ample scope for constructive dialogue in the years ahead.

So why was this week's meeting a disappointment? Part of the explanation is that the proceedings had been too well flagged. Then many of the participants were distracted by happenings elsewhere — the United States with the military situation in the Middle East and the Soviet Union with its survival as an integral entity, for example. But the significant explanation is that none of this week's participants has the faintest idea what the future of Europe will be like. Some of them appear to have been so distracted as not to have cared. And Mr George Bush's puzzlement about "this vision thing", presumably a synonym of "vision", has been infectious.

Yet Europe's future is not nearly as complicated as it has been made to seem this week. Counting Iceland as well as three Baltic states and Albania, Cyprus and Turkey (but supposing that Yugoslavia remains a single state), there are 30 nominally independent states in Europe. Even as things are, they are a diverse lot, some of them more nominally independent than others. Because of Mr Mikhail Gorbachev's continued fudging of the constitution that will define the relationship between the central Soviet state and its constituent republics, it is too soon to know when Russia, Byelorussia, the Ukraine, Azjerbaijan and even Georgia must also be counted separate parts of Europe. So, in an ideal world, the Congress of Paris would have offered a prospectus for a safe and prosperous Europe so beguiling that ditherers on the sidelines would have made up their minds.

Why did it fail? Chiefly because the imagination of the chief actors is still warped by images of the Cold War, whose ending was formalized in Paris. (The treaty on conventional arms, excellent in most respects, is strictly

irrelevant to national concerns over national security now that the Warsaw Pact has ceased to function as a unified military bloc.) But there are more immediate impediments to the general implementation of good sense, among which two stand out: economic disparities, mostly between East and West, and supposed ethnic and cultural differences, which are largely the results of the way in which economically depressed communities are first trapped in old-fashioned and economically low-yielding occupations and then kept there by the mistaken belief that they are protected from an even harsher world by their national sovereignty.

The real Congress of Paris, when it is convened, should start from the notion that Europe is a kind of club to which individuals (rather than their governments) belong, but for whom membership is secured only when their governments conduct themselves in a seemly fashion. The human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Acts, which would perpetuate existing borders (but not prevent subdivision by consent), which ban discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities and which provide for unfettered emigration (when there is somewhere to go) are a useful starting-point. They need to be complemented by criteria of what constitutes democracy and by provisions, culled from the Treaty of Rome, allowing for the free movement of people in search of work and capital in search of workers. Then it would be possible to look forward to a Europe so quickly made interdependent by more than 500 million people's personal inclinations that this week's remaining difficulties would melt away. Is that not a prize worth aiming at? □

## Antarctic wilderness

Mineral exploration should be abandoned, but research should be better co-ordinated and data shared.

THE Antarctic Treaty keeps accreting members, mostly on the strength of governments' eagerness to carry out research programmes of marginal interest on the margins of Antarctica, where the costs and physical difficulties are relatively small. At the meeting beginning this week at Santiago, the treaty members will now embark on a novel exercise — that of going back on a decision reached only two years ago, after endless negotiations, to allow and in the process to regulate the exploration for minerals (in-